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[www.cbs.dk](http://www.cbs.dk)

**ISSN 0906-6934**

**Print ISBN: 978-87-93155-34-3**

**Online ISBN: 978-87-93155-35-0**

**Public-private partnerships & the need, development and management of trusting**

PhD Series 17.2014



**Copenhagen  
Business School**  
HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

# Public-private partnerships & the need, development and management of trusting

A processual and embedded exploration

**Christiane Stelling**

Doctoral School in Organisation  
and Management Studies

PhD Series 17.2014

**PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**

**&**

**THE NEED, DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF**

**TRUSTING**

*A processual and embedded exploration*

PhD Thesis submitted by

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Doctoral School of Organisation and Management Studies  
Copenhagen Business School  
in cooperation with Falck A/S

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1st edition 2014

PhD Series 17.2014

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## ***Preface***

In 2006, Osborne published an editorial article in the *Public Management Review* (Vol. 8, Issue 3) arguing for the emergence of a new paradigm, being that of new public governance. He debates that we are in need of a more holistic approach towards public-sector workings that embraces the realities and complexities of our plural and pluralist state. Hence, the focus of such a new paradigm 'is very much upon inter-organizational relationships and the governance of processes, and ... [new public governance] lays emphasis on the design and evaluation of enduring inter-organizational relationships, where trust, relational capital and relational contracts act as the core governance mechanisms' (: 284). One such type of inter-organizational relationship is public-private partnerships (PPPs), which have gained popularity all around the world since the 1990s and following the academic discourse as well as political efforts, there are more to come.

However, although almost eight years have passed since Osborne's article, there are still surprisingly few publications on the processes of public-private partnerships, from the formative idea, through implementation to the life of such partnerships (G. Weihe, 2010). Furthermore, the focus tends to be on the organizational and structural dimensions of PPPs, rather than the managerial and more intangible aspects of such inter-organizational processes, although the latter seem more significant to the outcome than the actual organizational form (Steijn, Klijn, & Edelenbos, 2011). In other words, there is still much to be done if we are to acknowledge and understand policy implementation and service delivery as complex processes that happen at multiple levels across organizational boundaries and are more than pure executions of contracts.

It is the purpose of this thesis to contribute to a more holistic understanding of public-private partnerships by both exploring the many understandings of the phenomenon, but, most of all, the need, development and management of trusting between the partnering organizations. The aim is not to observe trusting as an independent or dependent variable, but rather as fundamentally embedded and relating to its environment as experienced by the involved managers. Furthermore, a focus on processes emphasizes that the world is always on the move and even seemingly stable patterns are in need of constant reproduction. Thus, the thesis contributes to increase the knowledge about ongoing managerial PPP practices as they appear and are experienced in time and space. These efforts have resulted in the following four articles that are attached at the end of this introductory paper:

1. Exploring the public-private partnership jungle: Stay precise and keep on mapping! (forthcoming in *International Public Management Review*)
2. Embedding trusting in time and space: Taking process seriously in inter-organizational trust research (being prepared for submission)
3. Trust as the vitamin D in strong relational public-private partnerships: Essential for survival but difficult to obtain and maintain in cloudy times (revise and resubmit in *Administration & Society*)
4. Towards an embedded and processual understanding of inter-organizational trust: Empirical insights from public-private partnerships in Denmark and Germany (under review in *Organization Studies*)

## *Acknowledgements*

To begin, I want to thank Falck A/S and the Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation for funding the three-year project and the Department of Business and Politics (DBP) at Copenhagen Business School for inviting me into an inspiring and interdisciplinary scholarly environment. Together, these three made the PhD journey possible and I am deeply grateful for this opportunity.

Throughout the past three years many people have supported me. My two primary supervisors, Carsten Greve, from DBP, and Ole Qvist Pedersen, from Falck A/S, have always been at my side when I needed them and provided me with helpful suggestions, guidance and valued questions during the entire course of the project. Furthermore, I deeply appreciate the feedback from my two secondary supervisors, Holger Højlund and Niels Åkerstrøm Andersen, from the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy, who were especially involved in the later phase of the project and who, with their inspiring, creative and constructive comments, made the final phase an enjoyable one (not to claim that I wasn't stressed). I also want to thank all of them for giving me the time and space to find my 'own' way and for continuously trusting that I would.

Another big thank-you goes to all my wonderful colleagues at DBP who have both engaged in long, challenging and fruitful discussion about my subject and, not least, offered comfort when I was unable to see the wood for the trees. Special thanks goes to my four PhD colleagues, Sofie Dam, Kasper Lindskow, Maj Grasten and Sofie Blinkenberg Federspiel, who followed my project from start to end and have provided me with thoughtful comments that doubtless sharpened my arguments. Also, I want to thank Grahame Thompson for his valuable comments on the PhD in various stages and Tamyko Ysa as well as Peter Ping Li for their constructive inputs at my pre-defence. I also owe much to Stine Haakonsson, Antje Vetterlein and Jeppe Strandsbjerg who have been supportive all the way through.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to my family (in law) and friends who have made it possible to have a life besides research and kept me entertained with birthdays, weekend trips, kids and weddings and, just as much, accepted my absence when the PhD 'threatened' with deadlines. To my husband, Morten Stelling, I owe particular thanks for being with me every day of this long journey: When I came home late, empty-headed and confused and also when I was

overly enthusiastic lecturing about trusting and PPPs when all he wanted to hear at 11pm was a good-night story.

Thank you, all of you – without you the past three years would not have been the same!

### ***English abstract***

This thesis addresses the need, development and management of trust in Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), an issue that thus far has received only very little attention. For this purpose, the dissertation contributes with four separate articles, of which the first two explore the main concepts – PPPs and trust – while the last two present the empirical exploration of trusting in PPPs by drawing on four in-depth case studies.

The exploration of the PPP concept in the first article focuses on the definitory and classificatory practices across disciplinary and professional fields and contributes with an inductive map of the dominant patterns. The review of PPP publications argues that the main divergence lies in the focus on two differing dimensions. While a first group focuses on PPPs as a new way of distributing responsibilities across public and private partners a second group defines PPPs as a new means for joint decision-making and interactive collaboration between public and private partners. For the thesis it is especially the second dimension – the relational - that becomes relevant when trust moves centre-stage.

In the second article, the dissertation addresses trust conceptualizations in an inter-organizational setting. The article argues for a more processual approach to (re)embed trust in time and space. Following, the paper develops a processual framework for studying inter-organizational trusting as ever evolving, always embedded and not least rooted in individual experiences of organizational members from various organizational levels. Finally, the article highlights the constitutive importance of contingency not only creating the need for trust but also its precondition. It is because we experience the future as open (contingent) that we are in need and able to form trust, i.e. suspend doubts and form positive expectations about another's future behaviour despite he/she has the possibility for alternative actions.

Following this processual framework, the third and fourth articles explore trusting experiences in PPPs for service delivery as one form of PPP. Particularly, the third article highlights that trust is constitutive in PPPs for service delivery that are based on strong relational contracts assuring a joint future rather than specific future. By continuously creating and suspending contingency into the future, these contracts generate the need for trust. The article also finds that that trust is difficult to manage when several organizational members and levels need to commit, intra-organizational insecurity is high and public-private prejudices prevail.



In the final article, trusting is explored across national boundaries by comparing four PPPs for service delivery, two in Denmark and two in Germany. The paper shows that trusting is indeed experienced and embedded differently – yet at the same time there are also a number of similar challenges and processes. Most importantly, the study shows that although German managers focus more on the perfect and all-encompassing contract than their Danish counterparts, trust does not become irrelevant. Rather the future is observed as inevitably open and consequently trust is important. Thus, while the strong relational contracts in Denmark include trust as constitutive, the weak relational contracts in Germany need trust beyond the contractually agreed. Either way, there seems to be no way around trust.

Over all, the thesis shows that trusting is crucial in PPPs and that it requires constant work and not least sensitivity towards its importance. While the latter may be intuitively learned and practised by PPP managers, this is not necessarily the case. Furthermore, it is doubtless a research area that deserves more scholarly attention in the future and a processual and experience-based approach can provide important insights into situational practices. Thereby, future trust research can contribute to prevent and/or clarify misunderstandings in an increasingly globalised world where inter-organizational relations are no longer limited to relations between organisations from the same country.

## *Dansk resume*

Denne afhandling undersøger tillid i offentlig-private partnerskaber (OPP'er) med særligt fokus på behovet, udviklingen og styringen af tillid, et emne som hidtil kun har fået lidt opmærksomhed. Afhandlingen bidrager med fire separate artikler, hvoraf de første to belyser hovedkoncepterne – tillid og OPP'er – mens de sidste to præsenterer en empirisk undersøgelse af tillidsskabelse i OPP'er ved at inddrage fire dybdegående casestudier.

Den første artikel fokuserer på, hvordan OPP-konceptet defineres og klassificeres i publikationer på tværs af forsknings- og faglige grænser. Artiklen bidrager med et induktivt kort over de forskellige praksisser, der bliver brugt til at afgrænse OPP'er fra deres omverden. Gennemgangen af publikationerne viser, at den signifikanteste forskel er, at én gruppe fokuserer på OPP'er som en ny måde at fordele ansvar og risici mellem offentlige og private partnere, mens en anden gruppe definerer OPP'er som en ny måde at samarbejde og træffe fælles beslutninger mellem offentlige og private partnere. For afhandlingen er det især den anden dimension af OPP'er, det vil sige samarbejdsrelationen, der er relevant, når tillid sættes i centrum.

I den anden artikel adresserer afhandlingen konceptualiseringer af tillid i en inter-organisatorisk kontekst. Artiklen argumenterer for en mere processuel tilgang, der genforankrer tillid i tid og rum. Hertil udvikler artiklen en processuel ramme til at studere inter-organisatorisk tillid, som altid udfoldende, bestandigt forankret og ikke mindst rodfæstet i organisationsmedlemmernes individuelle oplevelser på tværs af organisatoriske niveauer. Yderligere fremhæver artiklen den konstitutive betydning af kontingens, som ikke bare producerer behovet for tillid, men også er dets forudsætning. Det er fordi, vi oplever fremtiden som åben (kontingent), at der er behov og mulighed for at udvikle tillid, det vil sige udskyde tvivl og forme positive forventninger til en anden persons fremtid, selvom hun/han har muligheden for alternative handlinger.

Ved at følge denne processuelle ramme undersøger den tredje og den fjerde artikel erfaringer med tillid i servicepartnerskaber som én form for OPP. Specifikt understreger den tredje artikel, at tillid er konstituerende for servicepartnerskaber, der er baseret på stærkt relationelle kontrakter, der sikrer en fælles fremfor en specifik fremtid. Ved løbende at skabe og udskyde kontingens til fremtiden producerer disse kontrakter behovet for tillid. Artiklen viser yderligere, at tillid er svær at styre, når forskellige organisationsmedlemmer og -niveauer skal engagere sig, den intra-organisatoriske usikkerhed er høj og offentlig-private fordomme er udbredte.

I den sidste artikel undersøges tillid på tværs af nationale grænser ved at sammenligne fire servicepartnerskaber, to i Danmark og to i Tyskland. Artiklen viser, at tillid ganske vist opleves og forankres forskelligt – men samtidig er der en del fælles udfordringer og processer. Mest iøjnefaldende viser undersøgelsen, at selvom tyske ledere fokuserer mere på den perfekte og altomfattende kontrakt end deres danske modparter, er tillid stadig yderst relevant. Fordi fremtiden bliver iagttaget som uundgåeligt åben, er tillid vigtig. Ergo, mens tillid er konstituerende i de stærkt relationelle kontrakter i Danmark, er tillid betydningsfuld udover det aftalte i de svagt relationelle kontrakter i Tyskland. Uanset hvad virker det til, at der ikke er nogen vej uden om tillid.

Samlet set viser afhandlingen, at tillid er afgørende i OPP'er, og at det kræver løbende arbejde og ikke mindst opmærksomhed på tillidens betydning. Mens betydningen af tillid kan være intuitivt lært af OPP-ledere, så er det ikke nødvendigvis tilfældet. Derudover er det uden tvivl et forskningsfelt, der fortjener mere opmærksomhed i fremtiden. Her kan en processuel og oplevelses-centreret tilgang bidrage med betydningsfuld viden om situationsbestemte fremgangsmåder. Derigennem kan fremtidens tillidsforskning bidrage til at undgå og/eller tydeliggøre misforståelser i en stadigt mere globaliseret verden, hvor inter-organisatoriske relationer ikke længere er begrænset til relationer mellem organisationer fra samme land.

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## **PART I    INTRODUCTORY PAPER**



## 1 Introduction and summary

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have become a well-established way of delivering and developing various services and products around the globe. The spread of PPPs has not gone unrecognized in the scientific world where much focus has been devoted to evaluate their political, economic and social outcome (G. A. Hodge, Greve, & Boardman, 2010b), and to explore their institutional set-up and structures (Grimsey & Lewis, 2002; G. Weihe, 2010), as well as to discuss the meaning and history of the phenomenon (E. Klijn, 2010; Linder, 1999; Wettenhall, 2010). One topic that, despite the interdisciplinary interest, has gotten little attention is the need and management for trust in such partnerships (Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke, 2007).

This gap is surprising, given that the few existing studies point towards the importance of trust for facilitating and solidifying PPPs (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2007), as well as its impact on outcomes (E. Klijn, Edelenbos, & Steijn, 2010). Simultaneously, there is a vast body of research on inter-organizational trust in business relationships, showing its overwhelming positive effects (Krishnan, Martin, & Noorderhaven, 2006; Rus & Iglič, 2005; Stephen & Coote, 2007). Yet, the latter research field has also called for more attention towards the context in which trust appears and in turn we need to study trust in its environment if we want to get a richer and better understanding of its importance in a public-private setting. This PhD project aims to contribute to the latter by *exploring the need, development and management of trust in PPPs*.

This over-all research interest is, however, not straight forward, given the ambiguity of the two core concepts, PPP and trust. Beginning with PPPs, the wide array of disciplinary and professional fields in which PPPs have been applied is also reflected in the concept's usage for many models and arrangements that cross the public-private border. One type that seems to dominate the current discussion dates back to the 1992-introduced Private Finance Initiative (PFI), which was renamed 'PPP' in 1997. These PFI/PPPs focus on the private sector's financing of the design, construction and operation of large infrastructure projects. While they may be the most prominent PPP type, it has been argued that they are far from genuine partnerships, given their lack of a relationship based on trust, equality and/or reciprocity (Wettenhall, 2010).

This discussion does not just point towards the existence of other-than-PFI/PPPs, but also to diverging understandings of the 'partnership' term. Hence, when interested in studying PPPs, it is important to situate and distinguish the used PPP concept and potential classification from



other possible understandings and orderings. For this purpose, an overview of existing orderings and meanings ascribed to the PPP concept is indispensable. However, while there are some more inclusive overviews (Bovaird, 2004; Linder, 1999; G. Weihe, 2008; Wettenhall, 2010), little effort has been made to inductively explore how the wide array of PPP usages and classifications defines and orders the PPP diversity. To address this lack, *the first article of the PhD thesis explores the assumptions that constitute differing and similar PPP conceptualizations and classifications* and does so by reviewing PPP publications across professional and disciplinary fields.

Turning to trust, the concept embodies not less ambiguity and elusiveness than PPP. The variety of understandings is not least based on the many settings in which trust has been studied as well as the interest from numerous academic disciplines. Despite the variety, there is a tendency to measure degrees of trust and trustworthiness as dependent and/or independent variables and to simplify their relationship into input-output models (Möllering 2013). Furthermore, while there is an increased focus to view trust as a dynamic rather than stable concept, most process models identify sequential and subsequent stages. While they open up for backward loops, they ignore the continuous work of time and the consequent need for continuous (re)actualisations of trust and/or non-trust. Finally, literature on trust has increasingly called for multilevel and contextual studies of trusting and while important advances have been made, the problem with such approaches is their artificial separation of levels and context, as if they were to exist independently (Wright & Ehnert, 2010).

Thus, while literature on inter-organizational trust has produced highly relevant insights, they inevitably simplify the world by assuming relatively stable patterns, sources of trustworthiness and/or outside contexts. Put differently, these publications miss out on embracing the perishability and embeddedness of our world where any 'state' is in need of continuous reproduction as we move on in time and space. While a small number of scholars has introduced differing aspects of a more processual understanding of trusting (Dibben, 2000; Khodyakov, 2007; Möllering, 2013; Wright & Ehnert, 2010), we still miss a comprehensive understanding of what it means to take time and space seriously in inter-organizational trust. Following, *the second article in this PhD explores how a processual approach towards trusting can enhance our understanding of inter-organizational trust.*

The findings and discussions in these two first articles provide the background for the third article and fourth article. The first article finds that PPPs have principally been defined by referring to two differing dimensions. On the one hand, PPPs are seen as a new way of (re)distributing responsibilities and risks between the public sector and the private sector. On the other hand, a focus on the relational governance dimension of PPPs emphasizes them as joint decision making partnerships, characterized by reciprocity, trust and loyalty. While PPPs are doubtless often based on risk-distributing agreements, the focus in this thesis is on the relational dimension and thus the ongoing, interactive and collaborative relationship of such PPPs. With regard to the exploration of trust in such PPPs, the second article contributes with the analytical framework and highlights the need to follow the processes of how involved managers from all partnering organizations are able (or fail) to form positive expectations about the future in their concrete, situated and ongoing experience. Furthermore, the article emphasizes the need to study trusting as inherently conditioned by possibility-reducing assuring expectations, yet, it is an awareness for contingency, rather than security or predictability, that is constitutive for trust.

Following, the two last articles in this PhD thesis explore trust in PPPs as processual and embedded experiences. Specifically, *the third article is based on two case studies in Denmark and explores how trust is needed, developed and managed in strong relational PPPs*, being agreements that focus on future joint decision-making rather than a preregulated future. The article shows that trust is not only important but constitutive for strong relational contracts, given the openness of the agreement creating a continuous need to suspend doubts about otherwise possible alternatives. Yet, the article also illustrates how challenging it can be to build trust in such public-private arrangements, filled with contingency and uncertainty. Finally, the article highlights the complexity of inter-organizational trusting, given the involvement of many organizational levels and that the perception of the partnership/partner cannot be automatically transferred from one level to another and is not least changing in time. Hence, the need for trusting multiplies and if the latter is not coped with successfully such strong relational PPPs may disappear or turn into empty covers, rather than flexible and strong tools to approach the future.

Going beyond a focus on sector-specific borders, *the fourth article explores how national and public-private environments are (re)created in the need, development and management of inter-organizational trust*. For this purpose, the article includes two German PPPs and two Danish PPPs for service delivery in the healthcare sector. Theoretically, the article emphasizes the

keeping of trust and assurance (e.g. laws, monitoring practices, contracts) as distinct concepts. Following, the interplay between trusting processes and assurance mechanisms plays a central role in the article. The empirical analysis finds that there is a general tendency towards rather weak relational contracts in Germany, as compared to the strong relational contracts in Denmark. However, while in Denmark trust is expected within the contract, the German managers clearly expect trust beyond the contract. Thus, in all four cases, trusting relationships are continuously needed to deal with the ongoing PPP uncertainty. The analysis of the ongoing partnerships also illustrates a common public-private challenge for trust building in all four cases, being that of conflicting healthcare and economic rationales embodied in generalized distrust towards private sector providers amongst public employees. Finally, when focusing on the management of trusting (challenges), the analysis points towards a more proactive and hierarchical approach in the German cases, while a more passive and self-steering philosophy in the Danish cases creates the possibility for distrust to evolve and establish itself.

All in all, the four articles in this dissertation focus on the world as a process that is continuously shaped by interacting and inherently related individuals and practices. Thereby, it contributes with an open approach towards PPP understanding and experiences of inter-organizational trusting. Following, the thesis identifies patterns rather than laws or models and takes the point of departure in concrete practices and experiences rather than authoritative and deductive assumptions. For future research, the findings highlight that PPPs may be defined in many ways but require both partners and a partnership. Conceptual clarity is important, yet, we must also stay open as to embrace new emerging practices and partnership phenomena. Furthermore, depending on the PPP agreement, trust is decisive if not constitutive for partnerships and in turn more research can provide important insights into how trusting is experienced in differing public-private arrangements and settings.

For practitioners the findings highlight the importance of preparing whole organizations when entering partnerships as well as to staying focused when such partnerships are lived. While private managers may gain from being especially humble and understanding when partnering with sceptical public employees, the public organization should be aware of the importance of having a committed middle manager who is willing to trust and convince his/her team. At the end, both organizations need to be ready for the joint way-finding project. Finally, on the top-management level private companies can gain from nourishing their public affairs and relationships while once PPP agreements are procured and signed, a more proactive match of the

partnering middle-managers may be achieved by having joint assessment days. Generally, the thesis shows that there cannot be too much focus on building and nurturing trust on all levels, given that any PPP inevitably is confronted with uncertainty, be it beyond or within the contractual agreement.

## **1.1 Reading guide for introductory paper**

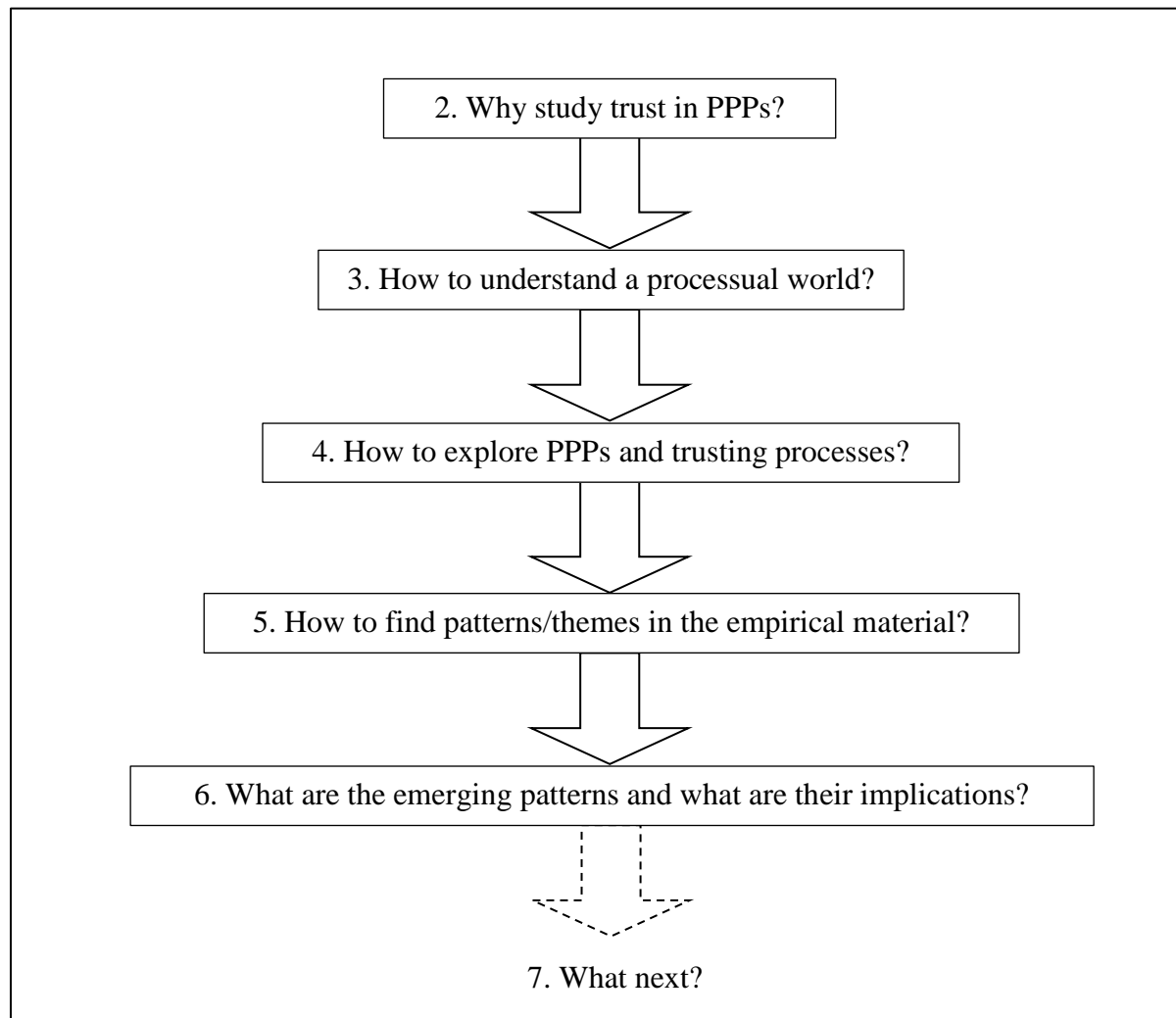
This thesis builds on four articles and the introductory paper aims to introduce, embed and integrate the four distinct, yet not unrelated contributions. For this purpose (1) the over-all interest and findings were summarized and introduced. Further, the introductory paper (2) presents the background and (3) deepens the ontological orientation and epistemological possibilities. Also, it presents (4) the methodology, methods and empirical selections, as well as (5) the analytical procedure used to examine the empirical material. These more abstract and methodical chapters aim to extend the rather short presentations in the articles, given their spatial limitations. Moreover, the introductory paper (6) combines the conclusions, contributions and suggestions of the four articles and discusses some limitations of the dissertations. Finally, in (7) some future research alleys are proposed.

To begin, **Chapter 1** has presented a short overview of the research journey by introducing the over-all puzzle and the individual articles' questions and findings. **Chapter 2** follows up by presenting the background for the over-all research interest, identifying not only a gap but also need for more studies on trusting in PPPs. The chapter further reviews the PPP and trust concept and specifies current needs for clarification and advancements that are addressed in the first two articles of the thesis and applied in the third and fourth. An overview of the articles concludes the second chapter. In **Chapter 3**, a processual orientation towards the world is presented. Although the latter is specifically explored in relation to trusting in the second article, the chapter provides a more general discussion of such a world view and discusses how differing degrees of a processual orientation are used throughout all of the articles.

**Chapter 4** addresses some methodological and methodical considerations that follow a processual orientation as well as the empirical selections. Specifically, I discuss the choice of documents and in-depth case studies as well as the conducting of interviews and observations when studying such an elusive phenomenon as trusting. In the subsequent **Chapter 5** I present the thematic analysis that has guided my analytical process in all four articles and has been supported by the use of the computer software Nvivo 10 that facilitated the exploration of the

many conceptualizations, classifications, interview transcripts and documents and made the process more transparent. The final two, **Chapters 6 and 7**, of this introductory paper combine and summarize the research findings of all four articles while also addressing some of the limitations and remaining gaps that may and wishfully will be addressed in future research. Figure 1 provides an overview of the main questions that are answered in the following chapters and can serve as a guide for the process of reading the remaining part of the introductory paper.

**Figure 1: Overview of introductory paper**



## **2 Public-private partnerships and inter-organizational trust(ing)**

It is surprising that the amount of literature on trust in public administration, public management, and policy science has been remarkably small. Public administration concentrates on strategies and governance or institutional structures, but the influence of trust and the possible usefulness of trust in public administration, especially in the context of complex decision making and the trend towards more horizontal forms of governance, have been largely ignored up to now. (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2007: 27)

Despite Edelenbos's and Klijn's efforts to bring trust in complex governance networks on to the research agenda, only a small number of publications have made trust their main research subject when exploring public-private cooperation (Brown et al., 2007; Edelenbos & Eshuis, 2012; English & Baxter, 2010; E. Klijn et al., 2010; Swärd, 2013). The main argument for studying trust is the growing interdependence, uncertainty and complexity related to the emergence of horizontal networks and an unpredictable future. In other words, trust is roughly defined as positive expectations and the willingness to be vulnerable and dependent despite the existence of uncertainty (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

PPPs can be observed as one such complex network where public and private actors cooperate about the delivery of a service or product by sharing risks, benefits and costs (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2007: 29). Yet, if PPPs are complex arrangements where partners are interdependent and vulnerable, why then has there been so little interest in studying trust? It could be argued that it may reflect an expandability of trusting in PPPs, hence the obvious 'gap' in the literature may not be worthy to be filled. Why otherwise do so few researchers explore the role, development and/or management of trust in public-private networks such as PPPs? There are a number of answers to the question, but the needlessness of trust is definitely not one of them. The subsequent section presents four reasons for *why it is important to study trust*. This is followed by a more thorough introduction of PPPs in the second section and inter-organizational trust in the third section. The chapter rounds off with a presentation of the four attached articles.

### **2.1 Trust in PPPs: An overlooked or simply unnecessary topic?**

First, although there is doubtless a dominant focus on regulation of PPPs, even the best risk-sharing agreement, the most efficient incentives or the most detailed contract cannot predict the future (Brown et al., 2007). In other words, even the most discrete contract is unable to predict

all eventual future events and thereby cannot fully eliminate uncertainty. While the latter does not keep scholars from focusing on the ‘perfect’ contract, it is widely acknowledged that trust is important to the ongoing process of PPPs (Reeves, 2008; Tvarnø, 2010). Yet, a problem with such general acknowledgements of trust is that they tend to (a) treat trust as a simple PPP variable and (b) leave the concept rather unspecified, conflating it with other concepts such as confidence or ‘a measure of predictability of behaviour’ (Skelcher, 2010: 299). Generally, there is a tendency to observe trust as the intangible and elusive variable explaining everything that numbers and detailed planning cannot. Hence, although trust is acknowledged to be important in PPPs, it often is assumed to play a secondary role while the primary source for success and value creation in PPPs is the perfect risk-distribution, the right contract and controlling/monitoring.

Second, the overwhelming focus on planning may be related to the dominant focus on PPPs such as the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) that was launched in the UK in 1992 (Hellowell, 2010). These PFI/PPPs are based on rather detailed contracting practices where private companies finance, design, build and maintain or operate typically infrastructure projects. As also explored in the first article attached to the introductory paper, publications that focus on such PFI/PPPs usually highlight the division of risks and responsibilities between included parties while the partnership dimension or the process of partnering receive little attention (G. Weihe, 2010). Thereby, the focus on PFI/PPPs seems to overshadow the emergence of other, more relational forms of partnerships. The latter encompass a wide array of collaborative arrangements ranging from joint organizations, loosely coupled agreements and/or outcome-based contracts. These are not necessarily long-term agreements but they highlight the importance of mutual understanding, reciprocity and trust (Bovaird, 2004, 2010; Hayllar & Wettenhall, 2010; E. Klijn & Teisman, 2005). And while PFI/PPPs may doubtless also be in need of trust to deal with the inevitable incompleteness and contingency of any contract, the argument here is that there are many PPP forms that, contrary to PFI/PPPs, focus deliberately on trusting and joint partnerships between public and private organizations.

Third, the need for trust in PPPs is also supported by the many books and publications on trust in inter-organizational relations (IORs) (e.g. R. Bachmann & Zaheer, 2013; R. Bachmann & Zaheer, 2006; Kramer, 2006, *Academy of Management Review* 1998 20(3), *International Sociology* 2005, *Organizational Studies* 2001 22(2)). Here, trust has been outlined to be important in a number of ways, ranging from enabling cooperative behaviour (Rousseau, Sitkin,

Burt, & Camerer, 1998), decreasing transaction costs (Dyer & Chu, 2003), enabling information sharing and dedication (Child, Faulkner, & Tallman, 2005) and influencing performance positively (Krishnan et al., 2006; Rus & Iglič, 2005; Zaheer, McEvily, & Perrone, 1998). The focus in these studies is, however, mainly on business and private exchange relationships. While conceptual discussions and general insights are definitely useful for framing and guiding explorations of trusting in PPPs, the increasing attention paid to the importance of context within the field of inter-organizational trust (R. Bachmann, 2010; Mishra & Mishra, 2013) emphasizes the need for separate analyses.

Fourth and finally, the few existing studies on trust in PPPs all support the significance of trusting. Edelenbos and Klijn (2007) emphasize the facilitating and solidifying function of trust in PPPs. In another publication, Klijn and colleagues (2010) show that trust influences (perceived) outcomes in PPPs positively. English and Baxter (2010) explore the changing role of contracting and trust in Australian PPPs, highlighting their mutual relationship and encouraging future research to deepen the understanding of the relational dimension in PPP-contracting practices. Furthermore, Edelenbos and Eshuis (2012) explore the interplay between trust and control in public-private networks, arguing that they both are equally important to deal with complexity, yet their focus lies on the collaboration between citizens, public agencies and private firms. Altogether, the few existing studies emphasize the importance of trust for the success and effective operation of PPPs.

While providing important insights, it is not surprising that the small number of trust studies on PPPs leaves a number of important issues unexplored: Why is it that PPPs are in need of trusting relationships? How is trusting developed and managed in their specific environment? What is the interplay between trusting and the embedded assuring mechanisms such as the contract, laws, procedures or monitoring practices between the involved public and private partners? *The thesis addresses this lack of research by exploring the need, development and management of inter-organizational trust in PPPs, specifically focusing on the latter's national and public-private embeddedness as well as the interplay with (re)produced rules, procedures and routines.* For this purpose, the thesis draws on conceptual insights from existing publications on inter-organizational trusting and follows recent calls for a more processual orientation (Möllering, 2013). Yet, before I introduce current developments of understanding and studying inter-organizational trust, some clarification and introduction of the PPP concept will follow in the next section.



## 2.2 Public-private partnerships

There has been much debate about public-private partnerships ... over the past few decades. Indeed, the whole partnership movement has become increasingly professionalized, technical and rational. But beneath the veneer, a paradox remains. Despite its popularity and its iconic status as a visible pillar of contemporary public management practices, the PPP phenomenon remains an enigma. We still debate its definitions, its historical origins and the degree to which it constitutes a genuinely new policy delivery ... (G. A. Hodge, Greve, & Boardman, 2010b: 3)

This opening statement by the three editors of the *International Handbook on Public-Private Partnerships* (2010a) nicely points towards the ongoing dilemma of PPPs, by now being a well-integrated and established means of policy and public service delivery, yet at the same time remaining ambiguous with regards to meaning, origins and disciplinary strands. Especially once we bypass the current dominance of PFI/PPPs, the concept seems to refer to a jungle of arrangements and assumptions rather than one streamlined phenomenon. The following paragraphs will briefly introduce the PPP concept beyond a PFI/PPP focus by presenting existing insights into the phenomenon's history, intellectual/ideological influences as well as types and settings in which the concept has been used. This introduction is far from exhaustive but aims to illustrate the PPP ambiguity so as to identify the need for more explorative studies of the definitory and not least classificatory variety of the PPP concept. To conclude, the section will shortly introduce the PPP-understanding that has guided the exploration in the third and the fourth article.

### *A long history*

Although there is a tendency among scholars to refer to the 1990s as the decade where PPPs were introduced, this clearly focuses on the UK's introduction of PFIs in 1992. A number of scholars have, however, called attention to earlier origins of PPPs. Here, we may distinguish between following the 'term' and following the 'concept' back in time. With regards to the PPP term, its use has been pointed to within the American urban governance literature since the 1970s (G. Weihe, 2008). The Reagan administration adopted the PPP concept in the early 1980s in its strategy to enhance urban economic development (Mitchell-Weaver & Manning, 1991). The PPP term was thus already well established in the US when the British Labour Government renamed PFI as PPP in 1997 (Spackman, 2002).

Concerning the content of PPPs, namely the mixing of public and private actors in order to deliver a service or product, Wettenhall (2005, 2010) has explored how public private mixings such as e.g. privateer shipping, mercenary armies and not least infrastructure provision have existed since the earliest civilisations through to late middle-ages Europe. Also others have pointed to the PPP concept's existence for centuries (Ghobadian, Gallear, O'Regan, & Viney, 2004; B. Li & Akintoye, 2003; UNECE, 2000). Hence, although the PPP term may first have been applied in the 1970s and 1980s and become fashionable in the 1990s, the history of PPPs as a concept does not first start with the introduction of the label. However, such explorations of PPPs back in time usually focus on any form of public-private mixing (funding) and thereby they use a very broad understanding of the concept. In a similar vein, while it is very insightful to follow the PPP term back in time, it is less explored how the constitutive assumptions about PPP differ (or are alike), leaving question marks as to whether differing settings and times also imply differing ideas.

#### *Various intellectual and ideological influences*

When shifting the focus towards the various ideas behind the PPP concept, there are some few scholars who have identified various paradigmatic and theoretical influences over time. A prominent example is Linder (1999) who explores how neoconservative and neoliberal ideologies are combined in the PPP discourse, allowing both for efficiency grammars (neoliberal) and arguments on the necessary relief of the overburdened states (neoconservative). Most scholars adopt the neoliberal influence by referring to the concept's roots in the new public management paradigm emerging in the 1970s (Grimsey & Lewis, 2004).

Yet, Linder's outlining of the neoconservative ideology is less replicated and usually replaced with new public governance emerging in the late 1990s (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). In short, the influence of new public management may be seen in the PPPs' competitive elements to ensure efficiency and effectiveness using private-sector companies to provide services/products (Bovaird, 2010). On the other hand, PPPs also break with new public management, given that the state retains power and is expected to both ensure 'best value for money' and improved

outcomes in the long run. Here, we see the influence of new public governance broadly focusing on outcomes, joint value creation and collaborative processes (Osborne, 2006).<sup>1</sup>

Bovaird (2010) points to further theoretical strands and ideas that show influence in the PPP concept while being from long before the acronym was introduced. He identifies the general focus on the government regulation of businesses since the 1930s which has led to a large number of concessions in the French transport infrastructure and public ownership of German private industries (: 47). Another branch of ideas that is very close to new public governance approaches is that of the collaborative advantage (Child et al., 2005; Huxam & Vangen, 2005). The latter mainly focus on private-sector collaborations such as private-private partnerships (alliances) and may be seen as a counter-movement to the dominant theories of competitive advantages that in turn are close to NPM rationales (Bovaird, 2010). While Bovaird indicates the influence of further theoretical movements, the here-outlined ideological and intellectual inspirations shall do to emphasize that PPPs are a conglomerate of disciplinary ideas. The latter can also be observed in the many types or forms of public-private arrangements that have been gathered within the concept and that will briefly be presented in the following.

### *PPP-types*

It has been indicated that PFI/PPP-types seem to dominate the current debate on PPPs. At least it is the latter that have been leading the PPP movement in the 1990s. Yet, they are far from one streamlined model but cover a wide range of task-combinations and time-spans (compare also first article). They have in common that they focus on bundling tasks and sharing related risks between the contracting public and private party. While not limited to, they are mostly used in large infrastructure projects. Yet, as especially outlined by its critics (Bovaird, 2004; E. Klijn & Teisman, 2005, Wettenhall, 2010) there are many PPP types beyond PFI/PPPs.

Following, institutional forms or joint ventures (E. Klijn & Teisman, 2005), urban-renewal collaborations and looser public policy and development networks have been identified (G. A. Hodge & Greve, 2007). In the UK, strategic partnerships have also been introduced as a differing type from PFI/PPPs (Ghobadian et al., 2004). Less extensive but still partnering are, for example, PPPs for service delivery (Domberger & Fernandez, 1999) or long-term service

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that there is far from agreement as to whether such a new paradigm exists and a number of scholars include the focus on outcomes and collaboration in the new public management agenda (e.g. Grimsey & Lewis, 2004), compare also the first attached article.

and management contracts. In other words, there is a range of organizational and financial arrangements that have been gathered in the PPP concept and also PFI/PPPs can take a diversity of forms differing in number and kind of included stages. The multiplicity of PPP types emphasizes the difficulty of grasping the PPP phenomenon.

#### *Settings (context)*

Finally, the many PPP types, differing histories and intellectual influences are not least interrelated with the differing settings in which cross-sectorial partnerships have been applied. The urban renewal partnerships for example are typically related to an American context (Bovaird, 2010), the PFI/PPP types are especially popular in the UK infrastructure sector, although today spread globally, whereas development and healthcare partnerships are mainly applied in developing countries to reduce poverty, social deprivation (G. Weihe, 2008) and improve public health (Buse & Walt, 2000). Less explored partnership settings seem to be research and development partnerships in e.g. the pharmaceutical sector (Nwaka & Ridley, 2003) and PPPs for service delivery in administrative and social services (Baker, 2007; Walther, 2009).

Generally, the number of settings in which PPPs may be used and/or developed is infinite if public intervention and/or private inclusion are welcomed. While differing settings do not necessarily mean differing conceptualization (just as differing histories and types do not necessarily need to be based on diverging assumptions), they still contribute the ambiguity and confusion that exists around the PPP concept. Let me in the final subsection discuss current dealings with the PPP variety and the need for a more open-minded and explorative approach.

#### *The PPP multiplicity and the need for exploration and conceptual clarity*

It has been shown that PPP is a conglomerate of various historical, ideological/intellectual, classificatory and not least contextual influences. In turn, it is far from surprising that opening quote emphasizes the ongoing struggles to define the ‘newness’ and content of PPPs. In other words, once PFI/PPPs are bypassed, the PPP field resembles an impenetrable jungle where, once you are in, there seems to be no exit, but everything turns into a PPP.

While there are some authors who have tried to map this jungle, they usually adopt predefined criteria so as to order the diversity. In other words, they search for differences between grammars, research streams, historical influences and intellectual ideas. While doubtless

contributing with interesting insights into the breadth of the PPP phenomenon, a more pragmatic and open-minded map or overview of the PPP phenomenon is still missing. In other words, how do conceptualizations themselves create a distinction towards their outside? And how do classifications relate to the constitutive assumptions of the PPP concept? It is this identified lack of a more inclusive and inductive overview of the literature that has inspired the first article in this dissertation. As the review is provided in the article, for now it remains to briefly introduce the PPP understanding used to identify PPP cases and explore trusting processes in the third and the fourth article.

### *PPPs as joint and collaborative arrangements*

This thesis follows a narrower understanding of the PPP concept, excluding outsourcing contracts as well as subsidized private projects and full privatisations. However, the primary assumption for excluding the latter is not so much their lack of ‘equal’ risk distribution between public and private organizations as it is their missing focus on joint decision-making and collaboration. To be clear, risk distribution is indeed central in most PPPs, yet it does not necessarily tell anything about whether or not the involved partners actually collaborate and build a relationship in which they move jointly into the future.

It follows that the emphasis in this thesis is on the relational governance dimensions of such PPPs and that the latter distinguishes PPPs from other forms of service delivery. As such, the conceptualization is inspired by literature on relational contracts (Macaulay, 2003; Macneil, 1974; Macneil, 2000) where the focus lies on outcomes and future collaboration rather than a detailed planning of the future. By promising a joint future rather than a specific future, such relational contracts enable partnerships, i.e. joint decision-making, interaction and collaboration. While the latter is not excluded from evolving in discrete contracts and inevitably remains an empirical and experienced question, it is the relational dimension that is constitutive for the PPP understanding in this thesis.

## **2.3 Inter-organizational trust(ing)**

Having introduced the PPP ambiguity above, this section presents another elusive concept, being that of trust, or more specifically inter-organizational trust. First, it briefly presents how trust has become a central research interest in inter-organizational relations and whether the change of setting alters the nature of trust. This is followed by short introductions to the main conceptual divergences in the literature as well as identified bases for trust. Thereafter, the

section outlines some recent calls in the field of trust research and a need for a more processual understanding of inter-organizational trust as trusting in time and space. Finally, the section shortly presents the approach towards inter-organizational trust in this dissertation that, however, is more thoroughly discussed and developed in the second article.

### *Trust in inter-organizational relations*

Trust already has been identified to be pivotal for creating well integrated social life since the middle of the 20th century (Möllering, 2001). It is, however, first during the 1990s that it moves from being a byproduct to becoming an important explanatory concept within business behaviour in organizational and institutional contexts (Long, Sitkin 2006, Bachmann, Inkpen 2011, Kroeger 2011). There are at least two main argument lines that form the basis for such an increased interest. Within sociological orientated literature, it has been recognized that the world is increasingly specialized, interconnected (globalized) and complex, which not only creates the need for more exchange relationships between organizations, but also confronts the latter with a high degree of unpredictability (Costa & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007). In turn, trust has been identified as crucial in an ever-changing world (Luhmann, 2000; Zucker, 1986). In economic and transaction cost theories trust is highlighted to reduce (transaction) costs by substituting for expansive and increasingly difficult monitoring and control mechanisms (Coleman, 1990; Dyer & Chu, 2003; Williamson, 1993). Hence, trust has been identified to be essential for exchange relationships in our globalized society.

The renewed interest in trust is both reflected in the large number of general concept explorations (R. Bachmann & Zaheer, 2013; R. Bachmann & Zaheer, 2006; Luhmann, 2000; Misztal, 1996; Möllering, 2006; Nooteboom, 2002; Sztompka, 1999) as well as more specific overviews of trust in and between organizations (Saunders et al. (eds.), 2010; Kramer, 2006; C. Lane & Bachmann, 1998; Nooteboom & Six, 2003). Among those that focus on (inter-) organizational trust it has been discussed whether the latter is merely a shift in the locus or a shift in the form/nature of trust (Dibben, 2000: 16). While some have argued that collective entities can trust in their own right i.e. be the truster (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012; Nooteboom, 2002; Sydow, 2006), most authors hold to a definition of trust as being limited to individuals. Some even suffice with individual senior managers to be representative for a whole organization, yet others highlight the importance of including several organizational levels and members (Currall & Inkpen, 2002, 2004). With regard to the object of trust (i.e. the trustee)

there seems to be agreement that it may indeed be a collective actor such as the other organization as long as the truster ascribes actions to the latter (Sztompka, 1999).

### *Trust as trait, attitude or state of mind?*

A first group of scholars, not surprisingly mostly psychologists, have defined trust as a psychological trait which is a relatively stable predisposition of a person's tendency to trust or distrust (compare e.g. Dikken, 2000; Mayer et al., 1995). The latter is not necessarily limited to a genetic disposition, but has also been argued to encompass early childhood learning (Baier, 2001; Hardin, 2001). Mayer and colleagues (1995) term the latter propensity to trust that 'might be thought of as the general willingness to trust others' (: 715) irrespective of the other and the situation. However, it has been argued that explaining trust as a mere dispositional trait is a rather deterministic approach, failing to observe the relational character of trust and thus the importance of perceiving the other as trustworthy (Mayer et al., 1995).

A second group of scholars conceptualizes trust as an attitude embodied in risk-taking behaviour and cooperative behaviour (compare e.g. Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Möllering, 2006; Nooteboom, 2002). These understandings have been accused of blurring the distinction between trust, cooperation and risk-taking given that any form of cooperative behaviour under risk is observed as trusting behaviour (Mayer et al., 1995). But, as pointed out by a number of scholars, 'not all cooperation requires that the actors trust each other and ... not all actors who trust each other cooperate necessarily' (Möllering, 2006: 41).

Following these criticisms, most trust scholars seem to agree that trust is more than a disposition and less than an attitude, although it may be behaviourally displayed (Mayer et al., 1995). Following, trust most commonly is conceptualized as a (psychological but not predestined) state of mind encompassing a positive expectation about a trustee's performance in the future. While acknowledging the individual (and learnt) character of trust these definitions embrace the trustee-specific dimensions and thus the inherent relationality of trust (Bijlsma-Frankema & Costa, 2005).

### *Trust, prediction and social capital*

A wide range of scholars has pointed out that uncertainty is a crucial condition for trust. In this vein, Lewis and Weigert (1985) formulate that '[t]rust begins where prediction ends' (: 976). Put differently and as already pointed to by Simmel in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, if we had perfect

knowledge about the other's behaviour in the future, there would not be any need to trust (Endress, 2002; Möllering, 2001). Luhmann (2000) notes in a similar vein that trust includes an overdrawing of information (: 31) while Giddens (1990) refers to a lack of full information (: 33).

Despite this wide agreement that trust is inherently related to uncertainty, there seems to be a tendency in the literature to fall back on observing trust as partly predicting. Here trust is conceptualized as a complexity- and risk-reducing mechanism (R. Bachmann, 2001; C. Lane & Bachmann, 1996; Luhmann, 2000), while others have measured trust as probability or risk (Colquitt et al., 2007; Dyer & Chu, 2003). Möllering (2001, 2006) is one of the scholars most preoccupied with arguing against such tendencies. He points out that trust does not reduce or eliminate future possibilities, but it suspends doubts related to the perceived uncertainty. Hence, trust requires uncertainty and a leap of faith that allows us to live *as if* the future was certain. It simply enables us to focus on something else than the complexity of the future, but the truster is inevitably vulnerable as alternatives continue to exist.

Another tendency is to observe trust as social capital based on well-functioning societal institutions and norms. To observe trust as social capital is especially pronounced in literature on generalized trust (Fukuyama, 1995; Rothstein & Stolle, 2008), often comparing societal levels of trust between countries. Such conceptualizations of trust are close to what Zucker (1986) has introduced as institution-based trust. Also these definitions have been criticized for their focus on uncertainty- reducing rules, norms and values. In this vein Yamagishi and Yamagishi (1994) argue that it is important to distinguish between assurance where sanctions turn the future highly predictable and trust where the future stays open. Following, they hypothesize that 'what is commonly believed to characterize social and business relations in Japan is mutual assurance developed in committed relations rather than trust as a bias in assessing imperfect information' (:140).

The discussion of trust, predication and social capital highlights the difficulty of studying trust as a phenomenon that seems to require uncertainty while at the same time bracketing it. In this vein, the literature disagrees about how exactly trust relates to uncertainty and consequently also how it can be explored, observed and/or measured. Doubtless, most authors emphasize a difference between trust and control, which is also reflected in the many special journal issues on their relationship (Organization Studies 2001 22(2), International Sociology 2005 20(3),



Group & Organization Management 2007 34(4)). Still, the line between the two concepts is far from unambiguous.

### *Bases of trust*

The above outlined tendencies are also reflected in the wide range of trust bases that have been identified in the literature. While some include risk-reducing cues such as sanctions, surveillance and monitoring to be a source for trust (Dyer & Chu, 2003), others mainly refer to cues that increase the likelihood of certain actions such as integrity, ability, loyalty and reliability (Mayer et al., 1995). Generally, a wide range of trust bases occur in the literature and McEvily and Tortorielly (2011) find 38 dimensions (here bases) that have been used in studies aiming to measure trust.

The diversity of trust bases is also reflected in the many terms that have been applied to the latter, ranging from antecedents, sources, trust cues (clues), good reasons to trustworthiness. They are, however, not only differing labels, but they also differ in breadth and while some specifically refer to the perception of the trustee, others integrate the surrounding environment. Either way, they all present a form of knowledge (Giddens, 1990; Möllering, 2001; Sydow & Windeler, 2003) that is interpreted by a truster to form positive expectations about the future. However, as outlined above, whether a jump is required, and thus uncertainty suspended, differs between the studies and identified bases.

### *Current trends and a call for exploring trusting in time and space*

Lately, increasing attention has been paid to more contextual (R. Bachmann, 2010; Mishra & Mishra, 2013; Wright & Ehnert, 2010), dynamic (P. P. Li, 2011; Nielsen, 2011), multi-level (Currall & Inkpen, 2002; Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012; Swärd, 2013) and integrated studies (Bijlsma-Frankema & Costa, 2005; Long & Sitkin, 2006; Vlaar, Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2007). Generally, the latter mainly express a need to understand trust in space which includes the specific setting of the IOR (e.g. sector, task), the individual relationships on several organizational levels (e.g. personal trusting cues, experience), macro/meso-level influences (e.g. national and organizational context) and the relationship between trust and control (mainly focusing on relationship internal control). The focus on dynamics further points to the importance of time as trusting relationships are not stable, but can change over time. Thus, it has been highlighted to study inter-organizational trust as a process where the bases for trust may change as the organizational members get to know each other better.

However, there is still a tendency to (1) see context as a relatively stable force that influences inter-organizational trust from the outside and, in a similar vein, (2) time is assumed to be an external ‘neutral’ parameter against which trusting is explored. In other words, although trust research is getting increasingly complex, incorporating more and more ‘variables’, it remains filled with pre-defined ‘influences’ and ‘more or less relationships’ (compare e.g. Das & Teng, 2001; Vlaar et al., 2007). Hence, the tendency remains to observe trust as a variable that is either influenced or influences (Khodyakov, 2007) and thereby they ignore the inherent and dual relationship that exists between the ‘affecting’ and ‘affected’. Furthermore, while accepting that relationships may change over time, they often assume sequential stages that, while possibly looping back, ignore the continuous need for (re)actualisations of a positive future given that time does not stand still and requires continuous work (Möllering, 2013). In other words, they miss out to explore changes in time rather than over or across time.

Möllering (2013) recently addressed this existing conflict between calls for more dynamic studies and prevailing research practices to measure and stabilize inter-organizational trust processes. In turn he advocates a process approach, moving the gerund(ing) central stage so as to emphasize the continuous becoming of trusting relationships. While he outlines five interesting views (or rather research subjects for processual approaches), a thorough exploration of a processual orientation towards trust as trust in time and space is still missing in the literature. It is this gap that is addressed in the second article that argues for the merits of such an approach and develops an analytical framework that can inspire future processual research. While the specific exploration and discussion is provided in the article, the following last subsection briefly outlines the processual understanding adopted in this thesis as it is important in Chapter 4 when introducing the interview techniques.

#### *Towards a processual and embedded understanding of inter-organizational trust*

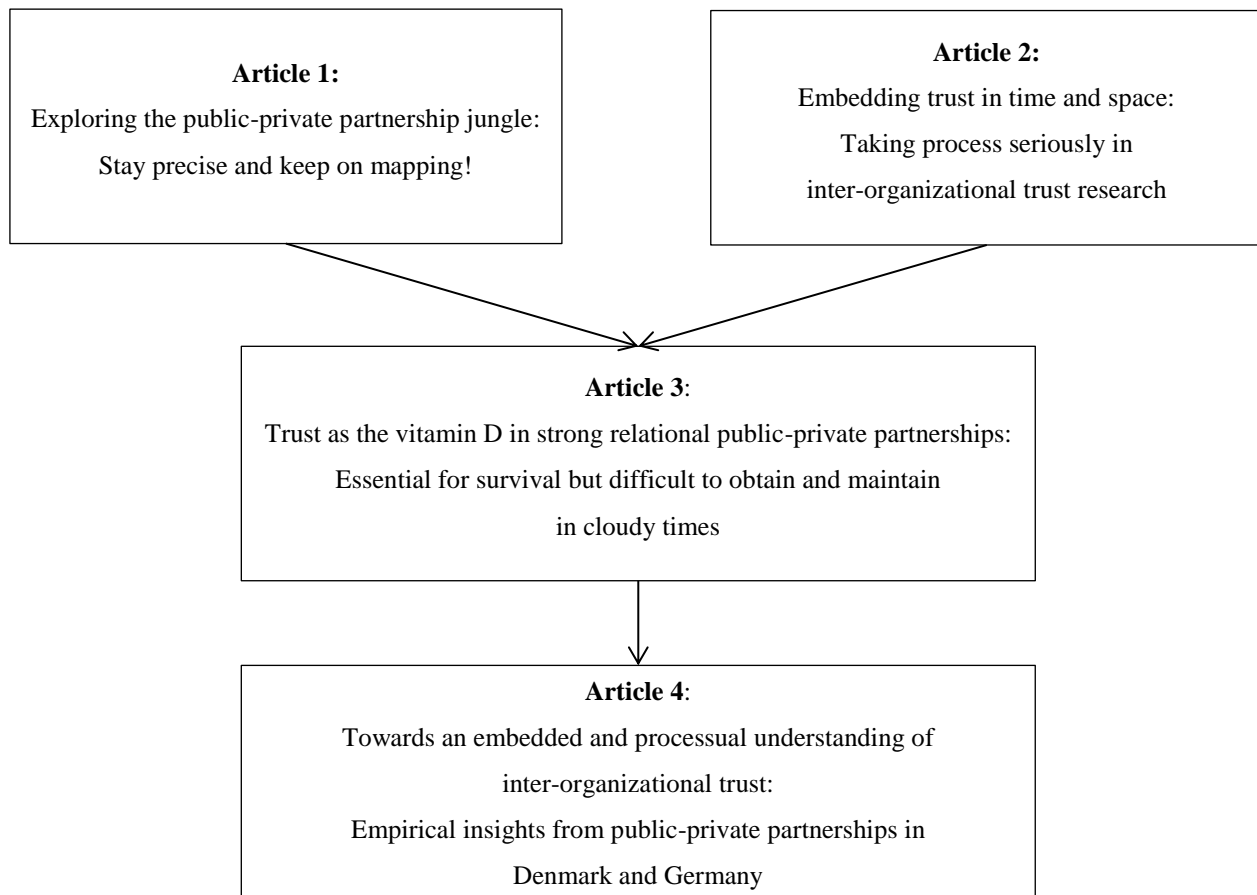
Following a processual perspective, I observe inter-organizational trusting as experienced by individuals involved in the relationship and thus a change of locus rather than the nature of trust. Furthermore, contingency is not only inherent in an ever unfinalized world, but it also forms the precondition for trust. Hence, trusting is conceptualized as present positive expectations about a partner’s future behaviour despite the experience of contingency. I thus agree with Möllering when putting the suspension of doubt at centre-stage in the trust concept. The bracketing of contingency is, however, not an independent decision, but rather inherently related to the perception of the other (trustworthiness), previous experiences as well as the specific situation

and environment. Thus trust is more than a relation between two or more persons. Furthermore, while assuring mechanisms such as sanctions, monitoring and rules indeed produce and limit the awareness of future possibilities (i.e. contingency) they are not to be conflated with neither trust nor trustworthiness. Finally, the gerund form ‘*trusting*’ emphasizes that it is an ongoing process in need of continuous (re)actualisations in ever-novel presents and as such even seemingly stable relationships are ever- changing.

## 2.4 Overview of the four articles

Having introduced the need for studying trust in PPPs and that such an exploration can gain by previous explorations of the PPP and trust concept, this final section provides a short overview of the four articles (see also Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Illustration of the four articles**



The first article addresses the lack of inductive and interdisciplinary reviews of the PPP concept and classifications. While some authors have explored the perplexity and diversity of existing

PPP conceptualizations, the tendency is to use predefined exploration criteria such as ideology, context, research stream or organizational form. While it is inevitably to choose an observing perspective, the article assumes a more pragmatic and open-minded approach by exploring how definitions and classifications themselves create the PPP concept's inside and outside. The article also highlights the co-creation of the concept beyond professional and disciplinary borders. While there indeed may be differences, it must be up to the analysis to explore how they emerge rather than assuming that different contexts shape differing definitions.

The second article departs from the general tendency to study inter-organizational trust as an acontextual and atemporal phenomenon. While there have been recent calls for more contextual, integrative and dynamic studies of inter-organizational trust, they still tend to simplify the relationship between trust, time and space by assuming stable either/or relationships. The article proposes a more processual approach towards trust emphasising its inherent embeddedness in time and space. While there have been previous attempts to advocate a processual understanding of trusting, a comprehensive exploration and discussion of what it means to think of trust processually is still missing. The article aims to contribute with such an exploration and while drawing on previous advances in the trust literature it is also inspired by philosophical discussions of process in organizational studies.

The third and fourth articles address the earlier identified need for studying trust in PPPs by drawing on in-depth case studies of PPPs for service delivery in Denmark and Germany. Specifically, the third article explores the need, development and management of trusting in strong relational PPPs and thus focuses on PPPs that explicitly include future contingency in the contract rather than trying to plan everything. The article focuses on the two Danish cases and by including public and private managers on all involved organizational levels, the article illustrates how trusting processes are not only embedded in their organizational and collaborative environment, but also co-created and far from streamlined given the multiplicity of participating managers and their employees. The fourth and final article concentrates on the embeddedness of trusting in national as well as public-private environments. While a processual orientation highlights the inherent embeddedness of any trusting processes, the explorations of PPPs in two differing countries illustrates how such national and public-private patterns are continuously and differently (re)created in inter-organizational trusting processes.

Concluding, the articles all highlight the importance of observing processes rather than assuming inevitably simplifying models of stability and prediction. In the following chapter, I will present the processual orientation that has guided and shaped all four articles, although in slightly differing strengths.

### **3 A processual orientation**

Day in, day out we experience things that we would never have envisioned really would happen, but it happens. And you need to react to that differently every day. That is why there somehow is no prescription. (Private top-level manager in German PPP for service delivery)

Statements like this appeared in most of the interviews that I conducted in the course of the empirical exploration. They all point towards the need to take decisions when it happens rather than assuming every-day management as rational deliberative processes purely representing contractual agreements, firm strategies and/or theoretical models. In line with the latter observation, researchers from various disciplines have called for more dynamic approaches to the study of organizational and management phenomena (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010). Instead of studying substances as if there was persistence and stability, we should become more sensible to the world as it emerges and perishes in time. While there may be relatively stable patterns, these firstly are continuous results of ongoing processes and secondly may alter and dissolve in time. It follows, PPPs are partnerships in time and space. They may seem to be stable collaborations, but when following their practising managers, it soon becomes apparent that continuity requires constant work from various organizational members and first of all is accompanied by many small changes.

Processes have received increasing attention in organizational studies throughout the past decade and are based on a renewed interest in early pragmatist, spiritual and process philosophers such as Alfred North Whitehead, Henri Bergson and William James (Helin, Hernes, Hjorth, & Holt, 2014; Langley & Tsoukas, 2010). Although these three philosophers above have inspired discussions on the meaning and nature of process, many of the ontological and epistemological implications that follow a processual view are also apparent in other streams of thinking such as post-structuralism, phenomenology, social constructivism or ethnomethodology (Carlsen, 2006).

In general, it can be argued that a process view is much more an orientation than it is a doctrine or theory (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010). As orientation it implies a certain way of seeing and assuming the social, but it is far from a coherent framework. The latter is not surprising given that the main thoughts are – to differing degrees – followed in a wide range of writings and by a range of thinkers (compare e.g. Helin et al. 2014). This chapter will introduce what the

dissertation refers to when it highlights a processual understanding towards the world. Hence, it outlines the main assumptions that have guided the research and analytical process. However, as will be briefly outlined at the end of this chapter, the different aspects are not equally relevant in all four articles given the differing research questions/interests.

### *The relational substance*

To begin, a processual approach ‘rests on a relational ontology, namely the recognition that everything that is has no existence apart from its relation to other things’ (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010: 3). Such a relation to other things is both spatial and temporal. Hence, PPP only exists as it establishes a ‘negative’ relation to other ways of service/product delivery from which it can be differentiated. Furthermore, PPP is not an unchanging substance existing independent from its history and prior processes as perceived in the present and projected into the future. Thus, central to a relational ontology is that phenomena are constituted by their relationships to other things. Such connectedness is neither causal nor random; it is constitutive and inherent to the phenomenon under observation (Chia & Holt, 2006: 640). Following, a processual orientation emphasizes the exploration of how entities connect and thereby become rather than assuming entities as if they had an a priori quality or relationship that exists independent of space and time (Hernes, 2008: 8).

Thereby, a processual orientation implies a move away from representationalist epistemologies where reality is presumed

essentially discrete, substantial and enduring ... [being a] fundamental ontological assumption which provides the inspiration for the scientific obsession with precision, accuracy and parsimony in representing and explaining social and material phenomena, since these are now regarded as relatively stable entities. (Chia, 1999: 215)

In a relational view seemingly stable entities are in need of continuously (re)connecting to their parts as well as their environment from which they distinguish themselves. There is no perfect world other than the one we live in and neither can ‘things’ ever be in a final state (Hernes, 2014: 48). It follows that a processual approach explores entities as they emerge in processes which may lead to patterns, but remains suspicious of categorisations that claim timelessness, universal applicability and Truth.

### *Endogenous processes*

A relational ontology also implies that environment or society do not exist outside the process as independent forces causing changes. Rather, the environment is construed from within the process. Thus, we need to stay with things if we want to observe how they come into being, how they relate to their environment as perceived from within (Hernes, 2014). The creation of dependent and independent variables creates an artificial separation by assuming relatively stable and autonomous entities to be connected in unidirectional relationships (Khodyakov, 2007).

It follows that a ‘context’ only can be recognized as a ‘text’ (Luhmann Niklas, 1997) and that organizations and societies are constituted in interaction processes between individuals. A distinction in micro-meso-macro is consequently deviating as any social structure creates and is created by interaction processes as much as the latter forms and is formed by organizational and societal structures. To be sure, we may choose to focus on organizations, yet when following organizational processes we need to focus on the individual interactions that make organizations possible by connecting to their decisions, rules, routines etc. In a similar vein we cannot separate organizational processes from the societal structures that enable and limit the latter’s (re)production in certain ways and thereby also are themselves (re)created (Giddens, 1979).

### *Temporality*

As Helin and colleagues (2014) formulate in their introduction to *The Handbook on Process Philosophy and Organization Studies*, one cannot exaggerate the power of time. It is the ongoingness of time that makes the world perish and creates the need for continuous (re)producing and (re)connecting of our world. It follows, it also is the inescapability of time that renders the future contingent, open and filled with alternatives. Yet, it is not only our future that is open, but so is our past, as it is in the present that we perceive both the future and the past. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) specify that we relate to the past by a ‘selective reactivation ... of past patterns of thought and action’ and to the future by an ‘imaginative generation ... of possible future trajectories of action’ (:971). Hence, a processual orientation recognizes the forces (path-dependency) of the past, but does so in the momentary experience of the latter and in a non-deterministic way. Thus, however much we may try to close the future by, for example, expecting the past to continue, it will inevitably remain open and is in need of active recreations in the many future presents to come.



### *Stabilising efforts*

A central assumption of a processual approach is thus that the world is in a constant flux, but that is not to say that there are no forces making the future more predictable. Hence, ‘to say that everything flows is first and foremost an ontological stance that actually challenges us to look for how flows are stabilized, bent, or deflected’ (Hernes, 2014: 16). The driving puzzle is how certain structures, institutions and rules are being reproduced and enable a reduction in the overwhelming complexity of a future if it was to be completely open.

There is a wealth of such forces ranging from contracts to general legal rules, norms, predictions, probability calculation and not least the physical constructions of fences, marked streets and other directing ‘spaces’. While they may not fully close the future, they are at least attempts to reduce some of the future’s contingency and they do so partly by relying on a continuation of the past. Contracts have worked in the past, why should they not in the future? Rules have existed for decades, why should they change tomorrow? Yet, especially in modern times we have become increasingly aware of the vulnerability of stability. We live in fast-moving, ever changing and complex societies and we cannot necessarily count on the continuity of rules. The latter also refers to the relational and the assumption that forces do not exist separate from the social but need to be recreated in social interactions. Hence, ‘control’ or stabilisation remains necessarily non-deterministic and incomplete.

### *Contingency and openness*

It follows that attempts to fully stabilize must inevitably fail and ‘absolute order can never be an actual factum; it is an ideal and all kinds of abstract logics and theories by which the social world is neatly put in boxes is superficial’ (Helin et al., 2014). Thus, the future remains open and it is not least this openness that forces us to select and that creates the necessity to decide and (re)shape the self and the processes of which we are part.

A processual approach reminds us of the world’s inherent contingency and that everything could be different even if it is not. Thereby we are encouraged to question the taken-for-grantedness and to look for the excluded, the non-chosen, the absent – all of which always form part of the experience. The contingency of a choice may be quite apparent, for example, in definitory practices that focus on delineating the inside from the outside. However, here it is usually not presented as contingent but the necessary absent. In other practices, contingency may be largely foreclosed and hidden – such as in the case of most institutionalized rules and norms in our

society that may not all be formalized but still are a standardized pattern for moving along. It is not least by pointing towards the contingency of seemingly non-contingent institutions that a number of social-constructivist, critical and feminist scholars have increased the self-reflexivity of society.

### *Selection*

Even though we may be aware of the contingency of our choices, the latter does not prevent us from needing to make selections. We can only be in one place at a time and we need to constantly select where/when and who. As indicated above, these selections may be experienced as non-selections, as mere continuations of the past. Still any experience/observation excludes other experiences/observations from happening simultaneously. The latter is not only true for every-day experiences, but certainly also for researchers. The inherent relationalism of our world also applies to research processes in which the scholar inevitably relates to his/her research object in a specific way. There is no ‘neutral outside position, from which we can observe the world and inform it how it properly needs to be corrected’ (Helin et al., 2014). The researcher’s role has also preoccupied much of the post-structuralist and system theoretical scholars (Esmark, Laustsen, & Andersen, 2005). When exploring Niklas Luhmann’s contribution to organization theory, Seidl and Becker (2006) specify that ‘[e]very researcher who wants to study an object of research has to choose (implicitly or explicitly) a way of observing his/her object. He/she has to distinguish what he/she observes from everything that he/she does not observe’ (: 13).

Hence, we inevitably need to choose a position *in* the world from which to observe the latter and once we acknowledge this it follows that such a choice should be an explicit one, so as to make the conditions for a given insight transparent and accessible to others. I will get back to the latter in the chapter on methodology, but for now I want to emphasize that a processual orientation and its departure in a relational ontology opens up for the contingency of seemingly stable and routinized processes, but can only do so from within the social and by taking a position in it.

### *Change*

Finally, let me explore the concept of change. Given that a processual orientation emphasizes that any present is a novel one, ‘also the development of stability should be seen as a change in itself’ (Hernes, 2008: 84). Furthermore, any change is also based on continuity as we can only make sense of the novel from within the familiar and the already known (Luhmann Niklas,

1997; K. E. Weick, 2001). Even if PPP managers are confronted with an unexpected event, they cannot react to the latter outside their own experience, which is shaped, but not determined by their past and expectations about a certain future in the present. Thus, when studying change, the focus should not be on identifying separate stage-wise models, but on how eventual ‘turning points’ embody the formation of new connections based on new inputs that alter past experiences and settings to appear in a new shape, rather than searching for abrupt, disruptive and sequential changes (K. E. Weick & Quinn, 1999). A processual view also emphasizes a focus on processes evolving *in* rather than *over* time. At the end, it is the ongoingness of time and our being in it that makes the world perish in front of our eyes and forces us to continuously reconnect and create changes/dynamic stability.

### *Summary*

A processual orientation is far from a distinct approach, but rather a conglomerate of a number of early and recent thinkers who abandon a realness of the world outside the experienced (or communicated) and emphasize a relational ontology in which subjects and/or things only exist in virtue of their relations in time and space as constructed from within. The ongoingness of time makes stability impossible and thereby the world remains inevitably unfinalized and open. The challenge then becomes to ‘study life in an on-going, provisionally open present in which a provisional closure of past and future is assumed as a way to move ahead in a moving world’ (Helin et al., 2014).

Hence, we search for patterns of closure that provide us with a feeling of stability and at the same time a processual orientation searches for the excluded, the contingency of these structures that are being reproduced in ongoing processes. Accepting the world as a relational whole, a processual orientation also recognizes the researcher’s involvement in it and that there is no place outside the social. This also implies that there is no final truth, no universal law, and no perfect world that we should try to reveal and/or get society to move towards. Rather, there are many experiences and expressed truths and structures that are being reproduced in every-day life – and by staying with things while questioning their taken-for-grantedness we can explore such patterns, how they keep on being reproduced and how they enable and limit the every-day way-finding.

### **3.1 The processual elements in the four articles**

In the following, I will specify the processual orientation of the four articles. Common for all the papers is their point of departure in observing the world as essentially contingent and thus always unfinalized. There is no universal law to be detected or revealed, but there are ongoing practices that both recreate and change patterns. Let me present the differing foci separately in the following.

#### *(1) An exploration of the public-private partnership jungle: Stay precise and keep on mapping!*

The first article focuses on the discursive dimension of PPPs, namely definitory and classificatory practices and how they create certain relationships within the inside and to the outside. By exploring a wide array of publications on PPPs, the article points towards the contingency of the PPP concept and the possibility to (re)create the latter in many ways. In other words, by exploring the mere existence of various definitory and classificatory practices, the article emphasizes that there cannot be an authoritative and universal understanding of PPP. Furthermore, it has been outlined earlier that the article focuses on the concepts' and classifications' own creation of insides and outsides rather than using adoption of a predefined ordering criterion for the review. Finally, the article also aims to overcome a priori distinctions between professional and scientific publications by including both of them.

Given the focus on the discursive practices of inclusion, exclusion and ordering, the article identifies tendencies in the literature, yet it does not inform how definitions are used and experienced in every-day processes of PPPs which is what most processual work would focus on. Also, the article does not follow the process of how the label has emerged and changed in time, although it points towards the existence of differing points of departure. However, it is mainly concerned with exploring current meanings and orderings. In other words, it is an ahistorical review of relations in space and therefore it is doubtless the least 'processual' article. Still, it shares foundational assumptions of a never stable and ever contingent world and the identified map illustrates current patterns rather than universal structures.

#### *(2) Embedding trust in time and space: Taking process seriously in inter-organizational trust research*

In this article, the processual orientation is most advanced. Given the article's focus on introducing a processual understanding of trust as trusting in time and space, the earlier

presented overview (see section 2.4.) has already highlighted the central processual aspects and I will not replicate them here. However, the article remains exclusively ontological and epistemological while a processual approach emphasizes the need to stay with experiences. In other words, it provides an inspirational framework for process research but actual explorations of experiences remain to be done.

*(3) Trust as the vitamin D in public-private partnerships: Essential for survival but difficult to obtain and maintain in cloudy times*

In this article, the processual orientation is used to explore experiences of trusting in public-private partnerships. While it takes all the identified aspects of the second article into account, it starts out by focusing on the interplay and mutual constitutive relationship between trusting and partnership ‘assuring’ contracts, procedures and regulations. Furthermore, by staying with public-private partnership processes, the article follows the need, development and management of trusting as the partnership evolves. Finally, by following the involved managers’ interpretations and experiences, the article allows for patterns to evolve from within, rather than searching for predefined trusting cues and/or public-private prejudices.

*(4) Towards an embedded and processual understanding of inter-organizational trust: Empirical insights from public-private partnerships in Denmark and Germany*

The final article follows very much in the spirit of the third article, yet has its main focus on the national embeddedness of processes. The article does not test or assume certain differences, but focuses on how eventual differences become visible when interviewing involved PPP managers. While of course also the PPP processes in the third article are embedded in their national environment, the comparison of two countries makes contingency more observable and helps to identify taken-for-grantedness (in a similar vein as genealogical studies explore changes in time). By analysing PPP managers’ experiences of trusting the aim is of course not to find universal national characteristics and/or evolutionary models, but rather to explore tendencies and patterns that are reproduced in the identified cases – be it PPP specific or nation specific.

## **4 Methodology, methods and empirical selections**

This chapter presents how discursive PPP practices and trusting processes were explored. Thus, the chapter shifts the focus from a general approach towards the world to the specific orientation towards the research subject(s). In a strictly relational sense, it is somehow artificial to introduce the over-all orientation separately from the methodological and methodical conditionings. The argument is that theory, methodology and methods all together condition the possible observation (Esmark et al., 2005). However, while presented separately their inherent relatedness is not neglected nor is it ignored. Rather it is exactly the aim of the first section to introduce how the processual orientation enables and limits the scientific observations in this thesis. The second section specifies the methods that have been used to get access to discourses and experiences, while the final section introduces the empirical selections.

### **4.1 Conditioning the possible**

This first section aims to introduce some methodological considerations connecting the over-all orientation with the specific methodical approach in this thesis. By doing this, the section inevitably also touches upon some epistemological issues concerning the kinds of insights that are considered possible in general and in particular when choosing to focus on discourses and experiences.

#### *Observing from within but keeping an eye on the contingent*

It has been outlined above that any observation must inevitably remain within the social, within the sphere of meaning, as there is no neutral position from which we can reveal or detect the ‘True’ essence of the world. However, just because we observe from within the social, this does not mean that a researcher should not question the observed by searching for the excluded and thereby pointing towards the contingency, conflicts or paradoxes of the experienced and/or the communicated. Hence, to acknowledge that it is impossible to be outside of the social emphasizes that any observation is inescapably contingent, but not that we are unable to explore the contingency and conditions of the observed. Luhmann refers to the latter as second-order observations and highlights that they inevitably also remain first-order observations – being one out of many possible ways to observe (Luhmann, 2001). This also emphasizes the need to clarify the possibilities and limits that follow the chosen perspective.

Let me briefly clarify the article’s perspectives. The first article is second-order when questioning the drawing of conceptual borders and ordering of classificatory schemes, hence,

when it explores the meaning of meanings and the ordering of orderings. Yet, it is first-order by deciding on its focus on the semantics of the discourse of PPPs (rather than e.g. the ongoing experiences, their ideological and conceptual origins, their organizational form and many more) and as such the insights are also limited to the latter. When following trusting processes, on the other hand, the research focuses on experiences rather than discourses. Given the focus on recounted experiences, it can be argued that the focus is, of course, on *narratives of* rather than *actual* experiences. Still, in the articles I refer to experiences or interpretations hereof as the term narrative somehow seems to question that these experiences were real. Yet, I do not question their realness, but I do observe them as but one possible experience. In other words, the observations are also second-order when exploring how these experiences (re)produce (dis)trusting patterns in the inter-organizational setting.

### *Beyond methodological individualism*

As introduced earlier, within a relational perspective the micro-macro distinction is viewed as artificial given that any societal process can only be observed by virtue of its many individual (re)productions and individual practices do not exist outside the societal processes. The focus on the individual is thus not to be confused with methodological individualism where individual subjects are observed as sources of meaning, intentions and rationalized thoughts that create the norm of the world (Chia & Holt, 2006). Rather, it is relationships that make the individual and it is by focusing on how individual subjects/definitions relate to their environment that we can observe how they become what they are.

These relations are neither predetermined nor random, but inherent and constitutional. Thus, when focusing on experienced ‘perceptions’ of the other in my explorations of trusting, I do not refer to individualized self-conscious experiences, but to how these perceptions are intrinsically relational, engaging in a dialogical process with the perceived. In other words, actors are not atomized individuals and neither are their experiences, perceptions, communications, or behaviours. Rather, they are ‘active respondents within nested and overlapping systems’ (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 969). Following, the focus is on how experiences and perception (re)create trusting relationships and while focusing on the self-dynamics as created in individual (not atomized) experiences, the focus on inter-organizational trusting includes the analysis of more than one experience. In a similar vein the focus on definitory practices of PPP field includes the focus on more than one definition but still, it takes the point of departure in the individual definition’s connectedness to an inside and an outside.

### *Discourse and experience*

Thus far, the differing focuses on discourses ‘versus’ experiences have been introduced on the sideline. It does, however, deserve some more attention as it enables very differing observations of the intersubjective reality. Most of the processually inspired work focuses on experiences (or narratives hereof) rather than discursive practices. In other words, the focus would more likely be on how individuals’ communicative practices relate, and thereby recreate, dominating patterns of meanings (i.e. discourses). When merely focusing on discursive practices, as in the first article, it can be argued that it neglects the place of the interpreting and creating subject by focusing on definitions rather than the authors’ (re)production of the latter. Yet, while it may be relevant to question whether discursive analyses can provide us with useful insights into how the social world is actually created in every-day copings, these definitory practices are the every-day way-finding of writing and communicating social scientists and/or professionals, at least in their ‘professional’ lives. Furthermore, in a relational perspective the publications do not exist independent of their content and thus the existence of PPP experiences.

It should, however, be highlighted that the focus of the first article is primarily on the conceptual and classificatory practices and does by no means assume a 1:1 relationship between the discursive and actual partnership practices and experience. In other words, the focus on concepts and classification limits possible insights to the discursively (re)constructed ‘reality’ of PPPs and should not be confused with partnership experiences. Still, I argue that both are equally ‘real’. The exploration of trusting experiences in PPPs then allows for the study of a differing, namely a practical or operational ‘realness’. It may relate to a distinct understanding of PPPs, but it is not merely an image of the latter. The focus on experience does thus allow for an exploration of the intersubjective construction of a partnership reality (and interactions) wherein trusting processes take place, are challenged or dissolve.

### *Generalizability*

Finally, let me specify some thoughts on generalizability. It would be simplistic to discard any attempts to generalize (universalize) as positivistic and it would be to subscribe to radical particularism if the articles did not aim to provide useful insights that can be meaningful beyond its particular observations. In this way, I agree with Miles and Huberman stating that ‘we should never forget why we are out in the field in the first place: to describe and analyse a pattern of relationships’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 17). Yet, such patterns are not deterministic or



representative and will inevitably remain open. Furthermore, following the relational ontology, they can only make sense as perceived/observed by the reader and thereby the relevance of conducted research – whether quantitative or qualitative – is always ‘co-constructed between reader and the text as he/she engages in a virtual dialogue with the script’ (Wright & Ehnert, 2010: 121). It follows that research findings within social sciences are inevitably tentative (Donmoyer, 2000: 52).

Thus, while the search for universal patterns of societal phenomena is to no purpose, social sciences can contribute to their understanding and they can challenge the latter by pointing towards the contingency of (re)occurring patterns. In other words, social sciences have ‘contributed to the reflexive analysis and discussion of values and interests, which is the prerequisite for an enlightened political, economic, and cultural development in any society’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Consequently, when studying trusting processes in PPPs the attempt is not to produce statistical generalizable and valid conclusions as aimed for within a positivistic paradigm and natural sciences. Still, the objective is to produce meaningful and useful knowledge that can inform and be transferred by researchers, managers and decision-makers and eventually challenge current practices and taken-for-granted assumptions.

## **4.2 Interviews and observations**

Having elaborated on more general methodological elaborations within a processual orientation, I will now specify the choice of methods. When focusing on the discursive practices of ascribing meaning to the PPP concept in the first article, I have chosen to explore a wide range of publications including scientific and professional ones. Given that the chosen publications existed prior to my engagement with them, the challenge here was mainly a selective one and will be taken up in the subsequent section on empirical selections. The second article on the other hand is an abstract discussion and does not include empirical material. It follows, that the focus in the following is exclusively on the research process in the third and fourth article and how I aimed to get access to the trusting processes.

### *Interviews and questions*

For the purpose of exploring trusting experiences and interpretations thereof I chose to conduct interviews while supplying these with observations in the Danish cases. The interviews were semi-structured, focusing on minimum structure and maximum depth, so as to allow the ‘respondents to define for themselves the content and range of variables they consider valid,

appropriate or diagnostic' (Kramer, 2012: 21). Still, I was, of course, clear about my focus on trust and control as well as the interest in the development over time (Lyon, Möllering, & Saunders, 2012: 11). Also, I had some predefined themes that I extracted from existing literature on PPPs, background material on the PPPs (e.g. Power Point presentations, homepages), expert interviews within the PPP field, contracts from the identified PPPs and pilot interviews with PPP managers. These themes were mainly used to get the interviewee talking and get an impression of their interpretations of different structural influences (if they were experienced to have any influence at all) as well as their evaluation of the other's trustworthiness when thinking back in time. Yet, they also helped me to 'question' the interviewees' recounts and ask for the eventual absent in their answers. An example of the interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

A challenge with regard to the interview method was that reflective reasoning about trusting (or distrusting) might be implicit rather than readily available to the interviewee. Thus, as pointed out by a range of trust researchers, it is rare that we are aware of the trust we place in others. Often, we first become aware of it when we are disappointed (Luhmann 2001). Therefore, I aimed to pose 'what if' and 'why (not)' questions so as to provoke the other to react on the existence of alternatives (or the denial of the same). Thereby, I aimed at challenging taken-for-granted structures and/or trust, encouraging the interviewees to specify why exactly they were expecting the other to act in a certain way.

To give some examples: When the interviewee told me about the usual procedure when meeting with his or her counterpart, I would ask what would happen, if the counterpart did not show up or proposed a different way of doing things. The interviewee could then say that this indeed was possible because of A and B, or that this was unthinkable because of C and D. This might require a 'why (not)' question, but usually this technique worked quite well to get access to the reflexive reasons and perceptions behind the interviewees' expectations. However, such a provoking technique could clearly lead to the perception of a rather naïve interviewee scrutinizing the most simple working procedures. Also, while it clearly led interviewees to reflect about less explicit reasons and structures, it is still far from exhaustive.

Another 'limitation' of the interview is indeed the questioning at one point in time – and thereby its dependence on selective memories about earlier trusting processes. In most of the cases, I only conducted one interview per person and used about one hour as to ask about the partnership

processes, letting them reflect about earlier developments, their continuation and alterations. In other words, the limits of the interview did not keep the interviewees from referring to the processual journey, the experiences as they emerged, continued or altered. Also, the aim was not process tracing in terms of revealing what actually happened. Still, the interviews only allowed explorations of momentary interpretations of earlier processes, alterations and continuations.

### *Observations*

Thus, despite well-developed interview techniques, there are still some limitations with regard to getting access to the taken-for-grantedness of structures as well as less reflected experiences of trust (Münschner & Kühlmann, 2012). Therefore, I chose to additionally conduct observations in PPP steering group meetings where all involved managers would be participating and discuss the state and progress of the partnership. While most managers knew me at that time, I asked for the chance to briefly introduce myself at the beginning of the meeting, rather than being introduced. Thereby, I was able to highlight that my focus was on getting to know the processes, rather than exploring the specific discussions and using potentially sensitive and confidential data. Also, I aimed to reduce eventual ‘curiosity’ and enable a quick transition to their usual meeting procedures (although my attendance, of course, inevitably interrupts some of the taken-for-grantedness).

The observations were not used as primary sources for the analysis, given the difficulty of interpreting trusting defined as a state of mind rather than an attitude. Rather, they supplied the interviews with impressions about the ongoing coordinating procedures. Hence, while the observation provided useful insights into the practical coping with each other and not least improved my understanding of the ongoing partnership processes, it was throughout the interviews that making sense of the latter took place. I was, however, only able to do observations in the two Danish cases while in the two German cases I had to settle with interviews (more on the case selection in the subsequent section).

### *The researcher's role*

It remains to elaborate briefly on the researcher's role. With regards to the observations, it has already been indicated that my attendance of course was recognized and may have influenced the participators' behaviour in a certain way. Yet, I was not given a lot of attention throughout the meetings and when asked about that in the interviews, the managers were not aware of any difference. With regard to my ability to interpret the observations, I am of course not inside the

ongoing processes and can only interpret from within my own understanding thereof. As such, I may indeed have ‘overseen’ the meaning of certain dialogues upon which I otherwise could have followed up. In the same vein I could ascribe meanings to behaviours that were not interpreted by the participating managers. The latter was however clarified throughout the interviews. In one of the steering group meetings I for example recognized that it was the private middle manager who was leading the meeting and felt that the public middle manager was somehow holding back. This was however nothing the two managers were actively thinking about, yet, the holding back observation was not by chance, as became clear during the interviews.

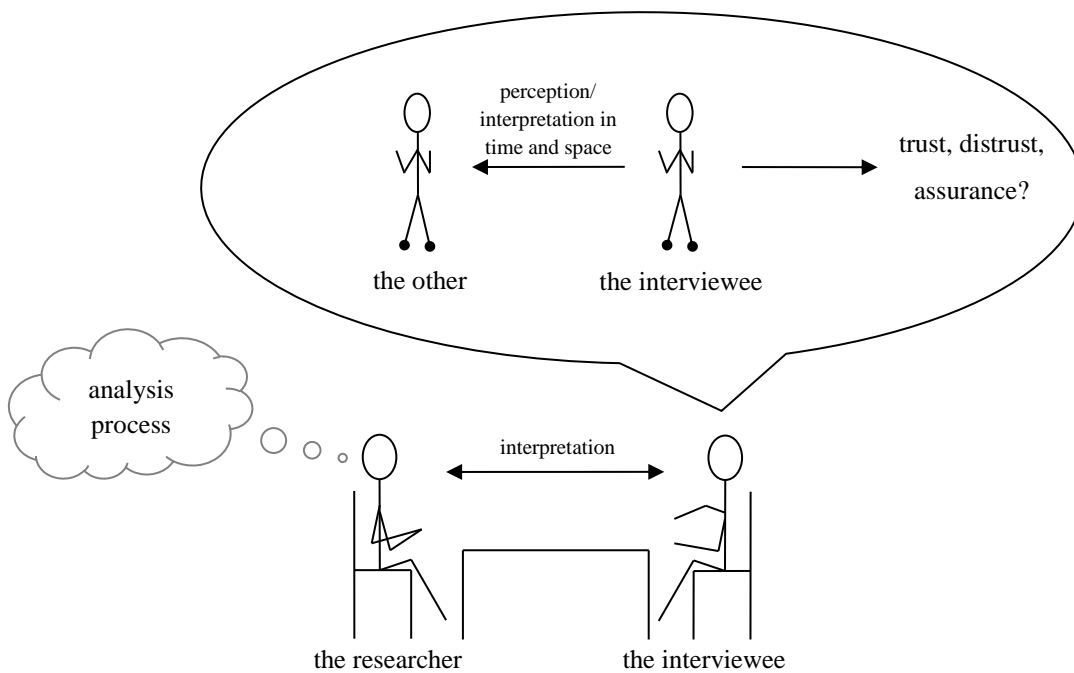
Turning to the interviews, my role was generally more active. It was not only about framing an over-all perspective, but in an interview situation the researcher also enters a dialogic process with the interviewee. Thereby he/she may aim to influence the answers more or less strongly, however, at the end it is, of course, the interviewee who relates to the asked questions. But let me specify three of the challenges that I experienced when interviewing and aiming towards exploring trusting processes in PPPs.

First, the subject of inter-organizational trust clearly was a sensitive topic, challenging the interviewees to reflect about processes and experiences that they were not used to in their everyday copings. Furthermore, the focus on the perception/experience of ‘the other’ also raised cautiousness as to how I would deal with the interviews in my writings. For the purpose of minimising such scepticism, I assured confidentiality to all the interviewees which clearly helped to open up their answers. An interesting experience was that many of the managers, once they agreed, seemed to welcome these interviews (or better conversations) for a change from the practical-oriented every-day management.

Second, and closely related to the above, the taken-for-grantedness that accompanied many of the trusting processes was clearly interrupted by the interviews and by, at times provoking questions. Thereby, the interviews interrupted not only the every-day life, but also challenged otherwise non-reflected ways of doing things that also seemed to influence the self-understanding of the interviewees. This is reflected by reactions such as ‘this is an awful self-evaluation that you force me to do here...’ (with a smile on his/her face) or ‘[i]t is good to be asked about this because it is important to refresh what I should answer next time they confront me with a critique’.

Third and finally, the focus on interpretations also led to a double – or even fourfold-interpretative process where (1) the interviewee did present his/her interpretation of the differing trusting processes by (2) relating them to my questions (as interpreted by him/her), yet, (3) at the end it was my relating to their interpretations that provided the analysis and now (4) it is you, the reader, (hopefully) making sense of the analysed. The interview situation is illustrated in Figure 3. Please note that this is, of course, a simplification and leaves out to highlight the inherent embeddedness of the process and not least the co-creation of the findings with the reader. Furthermore, although there is no ‘correct’ and ‘wrong’ of these interpretations, I still aimed to (re)create the complexity of trusting processes as experienced by the interviewees. Therefore I presented my initial findings to some of the earlier interviewed managers who provided me with useful feedback which I in turn used as inspiration (not ‘truth’) to reflect about the interpretations.

**Figure 3: Interviews and interpretations**



### 4.3 The selection processes – publications, PPP cases and interviewees

While the selection processes also are specified in the individual articles, they are confined to rather short presentations. Therefore, I will in the following expand these short presentations and also discuss some of the challenges with which I was confronted.

### *Choosing publications*

To begin, although interested in breadth the aim was not to cover any existing definition and classification of PPPs, but rather to identify publications that are frequently circulated and used. Therefore, I started out by searching for the 40 most cited publications and, so as to ensure interdisciplinarity, I used Web of Science as a search engine. I further included publications from global actors who are involved in ‘shaping’ PPP practices, such as international organizations, globally active consultancy firms and financial institutions. Finally, I included book chapters from relevant books on PPPs and added some PPP articles that were not part of the search engine results, but frequently referred to. This identification strategy provoked a lot of criticism when I got the article back from review and I do agree with much of the criticism. As presented in the article, I chose to increase the number of publications and not least address some of the limitations the selection inevitably still has.

Here, I want to address one over-all challenge of the article that not least has to do with differing orientation towards the world. A main conflict seems to be that the selection process aims to enable the identification of emerging qualitative patterns, but does so by including a wide range or quantity of literature. Thereby, the identification process implies a more quantitative and representational approach, which clearly also has been the dominant paradigm of my reviewers criticising some of the insights as if they were claiming universal applicability. As an answer to the reviews, I have chosen to both include more publications and thus address more positivistic limitations while at the same time I also have expanded the paragraphs on the pragmatic and non-positivistic orientation of the review.

As such, the breadth of literature was used to explore the variety, the contingency and eventual conflicts, but not to increase the validity of findings. The developed overview may not be (and will never be) exhaustive, yet this does not alter that it points towards existing differences and patterns that will not disappear as the number of publications increases. However, an expansion of literature and/or change of observing point may indeed point to further divergences and the article in effect encourages further explorations, as also illustrated in the title closing with the call to ‘keep on mapping’.

### *Choosing cases*

The purpose to understand and explore trusting processes in all their richness led to the identification of a small number of cases. The aim was to be able to get close to the

interviewees' experienced situations and to develop a nuanced view of the experienced reality. Furthermore and as Flyvbjerg (2006) points out, the closeness to the cases is also 'important for the researchers' own learning processes in developing the skills needed to do good research' (: 223). In other words, getting in-depth knowledge about the chosen cases also enables one to pose case-specific and relevant questions as well as to relate to the answers' embeddedness in the ongoing partnership process and experienced environment. While such an approach may very well explain the use of a single-case study, I have chosen to include several cases in order to potentially increase the variety of experiences, to get 'real-life' examples of contingency and to get a better understanding of (re)occurring patterns. But let me specify some of the consideration and 'forces' that have guided my selection of these cases and also challenged my original plans. In other words, the following paragraphs on the third and fourth articles highlight the ongoing process of doing research, and not surprisingly, it did not turn out as initially expected.

**The third article:** When choosing PPPs for the third article and the general exploration of trusting processes in PPPs, I first of all aimed to find PPPs based on strong relational contracts and thus a focus on a joint rather than specific future (compare also the earlier introduced PPP understanding in section 2.2.). Furthermore, I wanted to include at least one distrusting case so as to enable observation of possibly differing processes. The thought was that such a case could both help my learning experience and enrich research findings. Furthermore, as Flyvbjerg points out, 'atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situations' (2006: 229). While I personally would not use the term 'reveal' the inclusion of variety does indeed increase attention to constitutive and (re)occurring experiences in PPPs. As I was convinced it would be easy to find trusting cases, my primary efforts were on finding such a distrusting case. To my surprise, this was relatively easy and, apart from on public middle manager, all managers agreed to participate.

Second, I wanted to include a partnership that was at the very beginning and allowed me to follow the 'real-time' process at least for some period. Here, I also was successful and got the opportunity to start researching in a PPP that had been started just two months prior to my first interview. The early 'entrance' enabled me to be with the PPP in time and enhanced my understanding of the ongoing processes. However, illustrating the inability to predict the future, this PPP also turned out to be rather distrusting. As a result, I aimed to include further PPPs for my exploration in the third article. Yet, despite my efforts and a initial interviews in three PPPs,

this search was not successful and time was running out. At the end I chose to deal with the challenge by taking it as it was. Following, the analysis in the third article provides interesting insights into the importance of trust by exactly illustrating the consequences of its absence.

**The fourth article:** For the cross-country exploration I needed to include cases from more than one country. The specific ‘reasons’ for choosing Germany and Denmark are presented in the article. Here, I will suffice with presenting some challenges with regard to finding cases. First, there was the challenge to find similar PPPs in the two countries. The above outlined strong relational PPPs were both Danish were identified first and both concerned with the management of healthcare services. The following search for similar cases in Germany proved very challenging, both as there is less focus on such PPPs for service delivery in the healthcare sector and also as generally PPP concepts were more focused on detailed contracts. The focus on detailed contracting practices led me to depart from my initially focus on strong relational PPPs and, in line with a processual orientation, put the ongoing experiences of relational governance to the centre. In other words, the differing contracts have become part of the analysis in the fourth article.

Yet, still after identifying possible cases, the search remained complicated. Even though I was very privileged when being put in contact with highly knowledgeable and connected people, the research interest to study trust in PPPs seemed to split the contacted experts into very sceptical and trust-neglecting people and those who found the research topic highly relevant, but also very sensitive. In turn, my first efforts resulted in a number of refusals. In a second attempt I contacted a number of researchers who had conducted empirical research on PPPs in Germany and also I searched the internet to find further cases and practitioner-conferences on public-private cooperation in the healthcare sector. Many of my e-mails and phone calls were unsuccessful and managers excused themselves, citing a lack of time, the sensitivity of such PPPs and the agreed confidentiality between the partners.

I will not elaborate on the many differing strategies and answers that I tried, but just when I was about to give up the efforts were rewarded with two cases where at least one manager from each organization agreed to be interviewed. However, the number of interviews from these cases is small and is by no means purposely so. While the processual orientation emphasizes to be cautious of any attempts to generalize, the small number of included managers reminds of the tentativeness of the research insights. Furthermore, the identified PPPs in Germany are



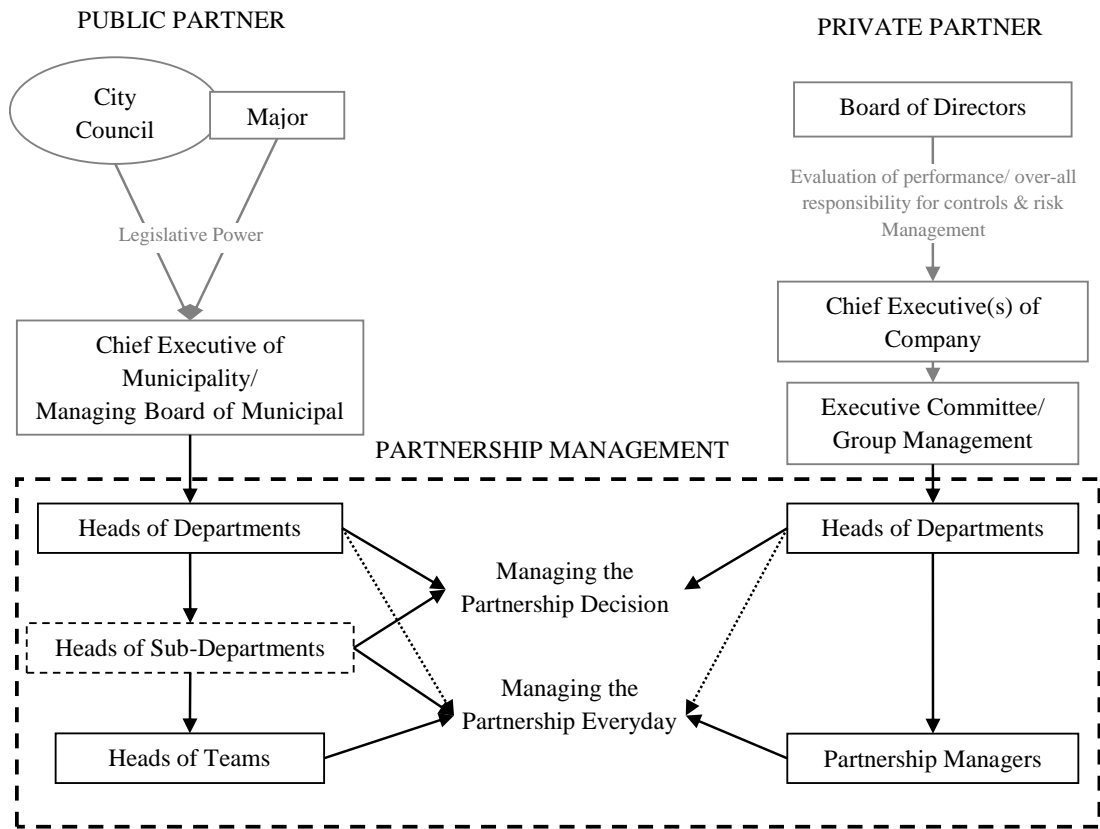
concerned with a healthcare service, yet it is not the management but the technical supply and maintenance of equipment in hospitals. The latter will be discussed further in section 6.4. on limitations and chapter 7 on future research. A more specific introduction to the cases can be found in third and the fourth article.

### *Choosing interviewees*

Finally, let me briefly elaborate on the identification of interview partners other than their availability. Given my purpose of following the trusting processes and the management thereof, I focused on identifying all the involved managers. In all cases, the relative relevance of top-level and middle-level management involvement varied in time and in one of the German cases it was a private top manager who took care of the formation and the ongoing management of the partnership for the private company. In one of the Danish municipalities there were three levels involved. In the other two cases, it was the top-level management who formed and negotiated the partnership, whereas it was the public middle managers and specific private project managers (who are also referred to as middle managers in the following) who were responsible for the every-day management and way-finding of these partnerships so as to meet the contractually agreed goal(s). Figure 4 illustrates the specific interview partners within a wider organizational environment (within the dashed quadrant). Please note that the arrows illustrate the hierarchical structures while the ongoing processes are of course more complicated and interrelated.

In total, 15 managers were interviewed in the four cases and an overview of the interviews is presented in Appendix B. The appendix also includes the pilot interviews and expert interviews that I conducted along the way and that, while not directly included in the analysis, formed some important background knowledge which guided the interviews and research process.

**Figure 4: Identifying interview partners in the hierarchy of partnering organizations**





## 5 The analytical process

This chapter presents how patterns were identified in the selected PPP publications and conducted interviews and observations. The selection process led to the identification of 113 publications of which more than 90 included rather clear definitions and almost 50 presented some kind of classification. The interviews used to follow the trusting process in PPPs led to a total of 214 pages of transcriptions. Hence, although the reading and transcription processes gave a first impression of eventually emerging patterns, there was too much text as to enable a straight and immediate analysis.

Here, the computer software Nvivo 10 facilitated the process and prevented me from becoming too perplexed at the diversity and richness of textual material. Within Nvivo10, one assigns nodes rather than codes, which is both broader in scope and also more open-ended than codes, which usually refer to predefined analytical concepts. Thus, the software also allows for more explorative studies, as done in this thesis. In the following I will briefly present the specific noding process that supported the identification of emerging patterns. In accordance with Boyatzis (1998) I use the term themes rather than codes when referring to analytically relevant notions.

### *The search for conceptual and classificatory differences and similarities*

The identified definitions and classifications were first gathered in an Excel table before importing them into Nvivo. Here, I started to assign nodes to the definitions, focusing on the underlying assumptions that were used to argue for the delineation of PPP from other concepts (such as e.g. risk distribution, whole life-cycle, governance responsibility, trust, joint management etc.). At the same time, I also noded the settings they referred to and how inclusive the definitions were (e.g. broad and narrow). Generally, the focus was to stay close to the text. In a second step, the themes were identified and analysed for their eventual similarities and differences. When searching for co-existing themes Nvivo facilitated the identification of patterns, yet, it was as much the noding (and reading) process that inspired the search for certain patterns.

Following the thematic analysis of the definitions, the exercise was repeated with regard to existing classification. Here, nodes were assigned to the chosen criteria to distinguish categories/types (e.g. aim, scope, degree of risk sharing/distribution, number of management

strategies etc.). In the article, I then related these identified criteria to the previously identified patterns with regard to PPP conceptualizations.

To be clear, such an analytical process does indeed not depend upon the use of software such as Nvivo10. However, the first attempt at finding patterns, which did not include any software, resulted in a printed Excel table about six metres long. The following marking exercise was difficult as the number of colours was defined by the definitions rather than predefined criteria and quickly exceeded the available number of markers. Hence, after being introduced to Nvivo, it became possible to get an overview of the many differing themes and how they co-occurred and, not least, it was possible to (re)order in many possible ways. Hence, the software was a great support when exploring the many concepts and classifications.

### *The search for (dis)trusting patterns in PPP processes*

Turning to the transcribed interviews, they were first all noded by case, person and country. While this was a rather straightforward process, the identification of evolutionary patterns was more complex. First, I needed to identify some over-all themes that I wanted to follow and while trust, of course, was one of them, their embedding assuring mechanisms was another. Furthermore, given the emergence of distrust in two of the cases, this formed a third subject. While these more theoretically generated themes (Boyatzis, 1998: 4) framed the over-all reading of the transcriptions, the actual assignment of nodes to text passages was open-ended and it follows that, depending on the experiences in the cases, not all themes were equally filled with so-called child nodes and neither were the child nodes predefined. The latter were purely inductive.

Let me briefly specify the process of identifying child nodes that first, at a later stage, were gathered in analytically valuable subthemes. In a first round of reading, trusting and eventually distrusting cues/experiences were identified by using very text-near child nodes (e.g. being a boss type, knowing everything better, thinking he/she is more competent than others etc.). In a following reading the same was done for the experience of assuring mechanisms (e.g. following of procurement rules, procurement rules assuring best value for money, procurement processes with two participants). Finally, another reading was used to identify passages where the interviewees specifically referred to the suspension of doubts and reflected explicitly about the existence of future contingency. This process resulted in a very large number of child nodes. An example of child nodes for trusting cues and experiences in one of the cases can be found in

Appendix C. In a final round of ascribing nodes, the focus shifted to temporal patterns and the differing interview passages were noded with regard to the PPP phase to which they refer.

It was only after this initial text-near noding the actual analysis – thus the search for (dis)trusting patterns in time and space – began. By using the query option in Nvivo, it was possible to look for all trusting nodes in the differing identified phases, followed by the same process for distrusting and assurance. The initial results were characterized by a rather big number of text-near child nodes which in turn were analysed and gathered in subthemes. First thereafter, patterns became visible. The result of this process was the identification of case-specific patterns that could be analysed for similarities and differences across cases. Appendix D shows some examples for query results after the text-near nodes were gathered in subthemes.

Finally, the results were gathered in a table that provided a detailed overview of all the cases and colours were used to highlight eventual ascribed relationships. Not all the patterns are used in the third article and fourth article, but, depending on the specific question and focus, the insights from the cases are explored differently. Using Nvivo10 doubtless enhanced the analytical process and facilitated a very text-near exploration before combining and identifying analytically relevant subthemes. In other words, it made the very inductive exploration more transparent, approachable and traceable.



## 6 Research insights

The dissertation grew out of the observation that despite the promotion of a ‘new public governance’ paradigm characterized by inter-organizational value creation, processes and trust, empirical explorations of the latter are still scarce. By exploring the need, development and management of trusting in PPPs, this dissertation aims to shed light on ongoing managerial processes in PPPs. In the following, I will summarize the findings of the four articles by presenting identified patterns and following suggestions. Finally, the chapter also outlines some limitations.

### 6.1 PPPs and trusting: Finding patterns in the multiplicity

Exploring trusting processes in PPPs is far from an immediate undertaking given the vagueness that surrounds the two concepts: While PPP is accused of ambiguity, trust is associated with elusiveness. The first two articles address this confusion and – by following each their way – argue that it is important to be open-minded and embrace complexity. For this purpose it is important to be explicit about the chosen and conditioning point of departure, but letting the process decide about the place of arrival. When the third and fourth articles explore the need, development and management of trusting in PPPs for service delivery, they follow experiences of doubt suspensions and by doing so they also show their inherent embeddedness and the potential for other ways of dealing with future uncertainty:

Trust empowers, alters, disappears.

Assurance enables, limits, depends.

Distrust challenges, persists, dissolves.

In the following I will present the insights from the first two articles separately before the findings from the last two articles are introduced jointly.

#### *The PPP jungle*

Based on an inclusive and cross-disciplinary review of PPP conceptualizations and classifications, the first article first of all identifies that the multiplicity of definitions coalesces around two dominant dimensions referred to when delineating PPPs from their surroundings. The *co-responsibility dimension* is concerned with the partner level and the aspect that PPPs are distributing responsibilities and related risks between the involved public partners and private



partners. This is contrasted to outsourcing projects where the main responsibility remains in public hands. It follows, when placing PPPs on a continuum between public provision and private provision, they are positioned further away from public provision than outsourcing contracts. This is reversed in the second, the *relational governance dimension* that refers to the aspect that PPPs are collaborative and joint decision-making arrangements while outsourcing contracts are mere market mechanisms where the private provider performs the clearly specified tasks independently. In other words, by focusing on the partnership level PPPs are placed closer to public provision than outsourcing contracts when locating them on the continuum between public provision and private provision.

While the two dimensions result in conflicting maps, they are also inherently related given that a partnership requires individual partners who in turn only are partners if there is a partnership. The latter is thus an unresolvable conflict that is constitutive for PPPs. It follows that an over-emphasis on one of the two dimensions undermines the importance of the other and may either dissolve the partnership or the partners – being the same result: no PPP. This does not imply that one cannot choose to focus on one or the other, but stresses caution when fully dismissing and/or ignoring the other's existence.

Besides the identification of these two PPP dimensions, the article also points towards the existence of two differing approaches within each dimension. The co-responsibility dimension encompasses both a *marketization approach* promoting PPPs as compensating for state failure and an *interventionist approach* referring to PPPs as compensating for market failure. The relational governance dimension includes both a *structural approach* assuming a positive relationship between structure and partnership and a *managerial approach* highlighting the importance of joint and interactive management for a PPP to become a partnership.

Furthermore, the review of existing PPP classifications illustrates the diversity of orderings and PPP types in the literature and supports the widely claimed ambiguity of the concept and its application to a multiplicity of arrangements. Hence, despite the identification of emerging patterns, the variety of conceptualizations and classifications illustrates the ambiguity of the PPP concept. The article concludes that we should not aim to hide or reduce the multiplicity of meanings and orderings, but rather to keep on mapping while staying precise about the chosen concepts, its exclusions and inherent conditions for the observable.

### *Embedding trust in time and space*

Shifting focus from PPPs to trust in inter-organizational relations, the second article promotes a more processual approach towards the study of trust. Hence, it emphasizes the following of processes as they emerge in their concrete setting, rather than searching for predefined and universalistic models. Thereby, a processual view takes its point of departure in an ever contingent and unfinalized world where ‘stability’ is based on continuous (re)creations rather than a priori laws. While we might try to close and predict the future, it remains inherently open.

The article highlights that it is the awareness of the unavoidable openness, i.e. contingency, that creates the need for trust in general and inter-organizational relationships in particular. It is because business partners can neither plan nor know everything that they need trust, as trusting is what enables partnering managers to suspend doubts and form positive expectations about the future partner despite the existence of eventual and unfavourable alternatives. Hence, it is because of contingency that trust becomes necessary and it is because of trust that business partners can deal with contingency without hiding or ignoring its existence.

It follows that trust should not be conflated with risk-reducing and/or eliminating assurance mechanisms, yet they are inherently embedding trusting relationships by framing the perception of contingency and possibilities. In a similar vein, the past cannot determine whether someone can form positive expectations about the future other, yet, neither can it be separated as we do not exist without our pasts. Thus, trust is inherently embedded in time and space which also refers to the environment and setting in which trusting relationships emerge. Finally, inter-organizational trust is an ongoing process that is in need of continuous (re)production by the many included managers and employees forming the relationships. It follows that trusting processes are not only inevitably open for change, but also for multiple and differing experiences.

### *PPPs in need of trust and trust in need of continuous work*

Following the developed analytical framework for studying inter-organizational trust, the third and fourth articles illustrate the role, development and management of trusting in PPPs by drawing on four in-depth case studies of PPPs for service delivery in the Danish and German healthcare sector. The focus in these studies is on the partnering managers and while their experience of employees is decisive, the employees’ experiences are outside the thesis’ scope

being on managerial processes (although indeed interesting for future research, see also Chapter 7).

First, it is shown that trusting is not only significant but constitutive for strong relational PPPs being partnerships based on open and outcome-based agreements. By leaving the joint future purposefully contingent and filled with alternatives, these PPPs create a continuous need for suspending eventual doubts related to the surplus of possibilities. In weak relational contracts on the other hand, trust may not be constitutive, but is still shown to be necessary as even the most perfect contract is inherently incomplete and the future filled with surprises. Consequently, trust is needed to suspend doubts about an eventually unexpected future and the possibilities that follow. Thus, differing degrees of contractual relatedness embrace future contingency in differing ways, but they cannot avoid the latter and consequently trusting is needed in all of them. While the Danish PPPs were generally braver towards including contingency by entering strong relational contracts, the German PPPs were, despite their emphasis on the perfect contract, aware of the impossibility of the latter.

Second, both articles highlight and illustrate how the relationship between trusting and assuring can be mutually reinforcing, weakening and constitutive. Thus, while inherently related, the latter does not preclude eventual conflicts between possibility-reducing assurance and possibility-needing trust. This is shown when partnership managers need to follow rather competitive procurement rules to select their partners which, however, leave little space for dealing with future contingency and the need for trust. Mutually strengthening relationships are illustrated when previously missing procedures and authoritative clarity are established and create a bearable, rather than overwhelming, number of alternatives. In some ways, this also illustrates that assuring and trusting can be mutually constitutive as without some kind of structure, trusting seems to be impossible and without some initial trust these structures may not be (re)produced. In a similar vein, it has been outlined above that trust is constitutive in strong relational contracts that in turn also create the contingency that is constitutive for trust. The latter is illustrated when the two Danish cases are afflicted by distrusting relationships and in turn disappear in practice.

The consequences of distrust also highlight, third, the need for continuous and active management of trusting on multiple organizational levels. In the PPP formation phase trusting is important amongst top managers to enable the suspension of doubts about an eventual failure of

the partnership. The two articles show that despite the differing contingency expectations in the contracts, both the German and Danish public managers highlighted the importance of trust when selecting their private partner while the private firms were concerned with appearing and acting trustworthy. Competence was highlighted to be the central trusting cue and in all four cases it was perceived through previous experience with the private partner. In other words, the past was central to building up positive expectations about the future when forming PPPs. Once the partnership started, the responsibility for the PPP was transferred to coordinating middle managers and the articles highlight the importance of their being on the same wavelength to enable trusting and collaborative relationships. Interestingly, there was a more active approach towards matching middle managers in the two German cases, although the need for trusting was, as outlined above, not only significant but constitutive in the strong relational contracts in Denmark.

Fourth, the processual analysis of PPPs highlights that the inclusion of multiple organizational levels is not without conflicts. Trust building is especially challenged on the middle level and employee level, given the existence of preconceptions about the public sector and private sector embodied in conflicting healthcare and financial rationales. The public top managers on the other hand all highlight the need for a more financial focus in their every-day management and thereby did not ascribe public or private value to the differing rationales. Closely related to the latter, trusting relationships in PPPs were challenged because they cannot be easily transferred from one partnering level to another. Thus, while clearly not existing independently of each other, trusting is formed by individuals on several levels and each one of them needs to actively relate to 'offered' bases from which to jump, even if it is by copying or relying on the top managers' evaluations.

Fifth and finally, the analysis identified differing modes of internal public steering creating differing degrees of freedom to allow distrust to emerge and establish itself. Whereas the more hierarchical steering philosophy in the German public organizations is outlined to prevent middle managers from expressing distrust, the more self-steering philosophies in the Danish public organizations leave the evaluation of the other to the middle managers. While the Danish middle managers clearly are expected to develop committed and mutual relationships, they are trusted rather than told to do so. However, the assumed freedom also allows for distrust to emerge and develop itself, which was illustrated in both the studied Danish cases. While trust following a more hierarchical approach may be because the manager was told to trust, it was in

both German cases experienced to prevent distrust from establishing itself. Hence, while the possibility of trust inevitably creates the possibility of distrust, a more hierarchical approach seems to limit exploitation of these distrusting possibilities. On the other hand, it can be argued that eventually developing trusting that follows a more self-steering approach may be potentially stronger as it is based on choice rather than hierarchy. This however has not been further explored and could be interesting for future research.

Over all, the exploration of trusting processes in PPPs shows that future contingency is not only an ontological stance but also experienced as uncertainties and risks by partnering managers. While there are differences on how to deal with such future openness, and the German managers doubtless prefer to plan away most of it, trust is inevitably significant so as to suspend doubts about the (residual) uncertainty and deal with every-day surprises. Furthermore, PPPs are more than their top managers and trusting middle managers are decisive for the continuous (re)creation of partnership relationships. Finally, these processes are inherently embedded, which is specifically highlighted with regards to the public-private and national environment, but also when past experiences are used to form future expectations. Yet, besides these emerging and (re)occurring patterns, the exploration first of all emphasizes the impossibility of predicting trusting processes and the future, which only leads us back to the indispensability of trust to deal with the never finished world.

## **6.2 Conceptual and research suggestions**

By drawing on above presented findings and insights, this section will outline four suggestions for current research practices. Beginning with PPPs, the thesis highlights that, despite some over-all patterns, variety prevails and thus, as also pointed out by previous publications (e.g. Bovaird, 2004; Skelcher, 2005), conceptual clarity is essential to any study of PPPs. Yet the latter should not be aiming to neglect and/or ignore other possibilities to define and order the PPP concept, but rather be aware and explicit about its inherent contingency. In other words, there is no ‘true’ way of delineating and ordering and the concept is co-created by practitioners and scholars from various settings and disciplines. Hence, and in line with a processual approach, it is emphasizes to keep on mapping by exploring the emerging diversity rather than moving too far into abstract a priori assumptions.

Second, the dissertation strongly supports the call for processual studies of trusting (Möllering, 2013). The abstract and empirical exploration of inter-organizational trusting emphasizes its

inherent embeddedness in time and space as well as origin in individual experiences. Thus, studies of inter-organizational trusting should focus on the differing organizational members that are involved and move with the partnership in time. As outlined earlier, this is not to emphasize methodological individualism but to focus on people as inherently related to their environment, the past and future in their present. Hence, the focus should not be on intentions and beliefs but on how interpreted experiences of trusting relate to the ‘outside’ world, the experience of future contingency and a continuation/alteration of the past (Chia & Holt, 2006; Hernes, 2014). The case studies all illustrate that time is at work and managers continuously temporalize into pasts and futures using the latter to form positive (or negative) expectations about the other. Finally, the empirical explorations of the dissertation also emphasizes that it is essential to incorporate the relation to the environment in the study of trusting in general and inter-organizational trust in particular.

Third, it has been outlined by many scholars that trusting includes a suspension of doubts (Möllering, 2001) or leap of faith (Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Luhmann, 2000). Without an experience of future contingency, trusting becomes superfluous and the dissertation emphasizes that future research should be aware of keeping trusting alive rather than explaining it away when referring to assuring mechanisms that reduce rather than accept future possibilities. Thus, when exploring the sources for trust, assurance definitely enables and limits trust, yet does not explain why or why not it develops. The studies of PPPs have illustrated how such a focus can identify trusting *beyond* detailed contracts rather than *because of* them. Thus, it is important to focus on the concrete experiences and how they expect the future other to perform or behave despite the perception of other possibilities.

Finally and fourth, the thesis also emphasizes to stay open-minded and explorative rather than following pre-defined models – that doubtless can inspire and provoke thoughts – but inevitably simplify the complex processes. In line with this, the proposed processual understanding also highlights to refrain from artificial separations between micro, meso and macro levels, but rather to let the experiences decide how and what to (re)create and thereby identify patterns from within rather than from above or outside.

### **6.3 Practical suggestions**

In the following, I will present six practical suggestions that follow my observations and insights from the exploration of trusting processes in PPPs. First, the choice of strong relational

PPPs is a brave one that can allow for future flexibility and openness, yet make them depend on trust and continuous (re)creation hereof. In other words, the strength of such contracts is also their Achilles heel and source of fragility. When choosing such a partnership model, public managers should be aware of the inherent need for trust to enable the adaptive and highly customized joint future. In a similar vein, private providers should be aware of the many unknowns and that future performance is a co-creation that cannot be without trust and commitment. While especially relevant in strong relational PPPs, the findings also highlight that trust becomes inevitably necessary when dealing with an ever open future.

Second, a practical suggestion that cannot be exaggerated is the importance of preparing the public organization and an active involvement of employees may not guarantee, but can clearly encourage, the development of trust. Furthermore, the preparation should not only be focused on the employee level, but just as much include the middle managers. The latter is not to suggest that the public top manager should not trust his/her middle manager or reintroduce hierarchical steering-models, but rather to emphasize the importance of a dedicated and trusting middle manager for the active and ongoing life of partnerships. As illustrated in the German cases, an active match of the collaborating middle managers may be one way of stimulating trusting and thus smooth relationships. Joint assessment days may be one way forward.

Third, the findings also highlight that the public-private distinction was experienced as generalized distrust especially amongst public employees. Although such categorisations seem to disappear at the top management level, preconceptions of the profit-driven private provider are being (re)produced in the everyday cooperation. For the private provider, the potentially lingering (or explicit) degrees of generalized distrust may require especially humble and understanding attitudes at least while getting to know each other. For the public top managers the latter only reemphasizes the need to prepare their organizations and not least challenge the taken-for-granted expectations. PPP is more than a major restructuring as it also involves a partner that needs to be incorporated in the years to come.

Fourth, with regard to the formation of PPPs, negotiated procedures are to be preferred by public decision-makers given their possibility for dialogue and to go beyond paper-work and documents to evaluate the private firms' trustworthiness. While the latter cannot compensate for the advantage held by previous private providers (or long-term relationships), it at least opens up the field and enables others to present their competence in person (team). On January 15 2014,

the European Parliament approved new rules for public procurement and concessions, allowing more flexible procurement procedures which cannot only enhance the focus on joint quality and development/innovation, but also, as has been the concern of this dissertation, allow better evaluation of each other so as to be able to suspend eventual doubts and trust the chosen firm to be able and willing to carry out the future task beyond the specifics in any contract.

Fifth, given that such negotiations throughout procurement procedures can still not fully compensate for the influence of prior experiences and relationships, it can be an advantage for private providers to actively cultivate their connections and eventually also hire well connected and reputed people. Generally, the findings suggest the usefulness of an active public-relations department that both may itself be building/sustaining relationships and keeping managers in the firm focused on nurturing their existing connections. Such a department or team may not least also be helpful in improving the understanding of specific 'public' challenges among private middle managers. Still, a well-functioning public-affairs department does not decrease the importance of performing and building good relationships between the coordinating managers in everyday cooperation.

Finally and sixth, while the dissertation does not directly address the issue of performance in terms of measuring the impact of trust (which would run counter to a processual orientation), it illustrates that trusting is inherently related to the performance of PPPs. On the one hand and more abstractly, it enables joint decision-making without which the partnership becomes an empty cover unable to perform as a partnership. On the other hand, all interviewed managers highlighted the importance of trust for the ongoing functioning of partnerships and as such it also relates to the partnership performance.

Hence, trust should not, as Williamson (1993) implies in his later work on transaction cost economics, be reserved for thick family relationships and friendships. Rather, effective suspensions of doubts are continuously needed in business relationships and specifically in more relational contracts. In turn, although trust has moved more and more centre-stage in publications, the dissertation re-emphasizes the need to acknowledge the fundamental and central role of trusting in IORs in general, yet, particularly in PPPs: There cannot be too much focus on building and nurturing trusting relationships. While this may unsettle practitioners who prefer risk calculations and plans, I can only re-emphasize that any calculation or plan may fail and at the latest then trust can be the lifeboat that may sail the partners safely to the other side.



However, if it wasn't for hard manufacturing work and continuous maintenance the lifeboat may be too ruined and fragile to save the partnership.

## **6.4 Limitations**

This final section of the chapter will discuss five limitations of the research findings. First, it has already been discussed that the first article has some limitations with regards to the publication selection. While the aim was not to produce an exhaustive and representational map of the whole PPP field, the stated ambition to produce an overview does nonetheless imply a rather extensive review of publications. While I would argue that the inclusion of 113 publications is not an insufficient number to explore eventual similarities and differences, it is not unwarranted to ask for an inclusion of more publications. Furthermore, it has been outlined that the use of Web of Science may be biased towards American articles and articles from natural sciences and while I have tried to make up for the latter by actively searching for more publications of initially identified PPP usages (and contexts), the latter selection process is not a streamlined search procedure. Similarly, the identification of globally involved actors was a qualitative selection process and some organizations may be excluded from the review.

Second, the empirical exploration of trusting in PPPs is based on four cases and a total of 15 interviews. While the latter cannot live up to more quantitative and representational standards, process research emphasizes the 'power of examples' as 'they are experienced, but the experiencing self's relationship to the self is thoroughly social' (Helin et al., 2014). Still, I want to re-emphasize that findings are tentative and while necessarily so in social sciences (if not in science in general), I would have preferred a bigger number of cases and interviews, not least for my own understanding, yet the difficulties to find cases in Germany have been introduced earlier.

Third, the way of studying the trusting processes has some limitations concerning the processual. As indicated earlier, most of the managers were only interviewed at one point in time and although the focus was on asking for their ongoing experiences, memory is necessarily selective and becomes blurry with time. Given the retrospective focus, the interview situations were a possibility for after-rationalising. On the other hand, the latter is inherent in any interview situation and given that it is – to date – impossible to read thoughts, the study of trusting must fall back on retrospective interpretations of experiences rather than immediate ones. However, a longitudinal observation study that is combined with questions about the

interpretations of the experiences along the line can of course come closer to the momentary and constant remodelling of past and future experience.

Fourth, the comparison of German and Danish PPPs has some important limitations as to the identified patterns suggesting some further research. The challenge was to find relatively similar PPPs to minimize differences between model-integral or structure-integral conditions for trusting. While it is possible to observe that differing experiences of contracts exist and lead to differing expectations towards trusting within and beyond the contract, it may be questioned whether these differing contractual practices are an expression of national differences or the differing degrees of possible standardization of the PPP task. Although my earlier exploration of PPPs in infrastructure between Germany and Denmark (Schulze 2009) have left a similar picture and the pronounced focus on contractual agreements in Germany is also supported by other studies (Lane & Bachmann 1998, Burchell and Wilkinson 1997), more elaborations of the latter may provide more nuanced insights by, for example, comparing PPPs concerned with equal services.

Fifth and finally, the study could have benefited from elaborating on contingency dimensions that may be developed more or less strongly in different PPPs. As shown in the comparison between Denmark and Germany, future openness may emerge within and beyond the contract. Yet, the latter may also be related to what Luhmann calls the time, the social and the factual dimension (Andersen, 2012). It follows that the two Danish contracts especially enable future social and factual contingency as two partners leave their partner identity to be shaped in the future as well as the exact how and what to be decided throughout the partnership. In the German contracts, on the other hand, it seems to be especially the long life-span that explains the ongoing contingency that keeps on ‘surprising’ and creates the need for adjustment. Hence, by supplying general assumptions of relational contracting and future openness with differing dimensions of potential contingency, the dissertation could have provided further interesting insights.



## **7 Outlook and future research**

This final chapter will present an outlook and some suggestions for future research that follow the thesis but also my personal research process. I will focus on suggestions that have not been mentioned in the articles but go beyond the individual conclusions. Let me begin with PPPs. Following current developments, it seems indisputable that PPPs are here to stay. While the financial pressure on public budgets is doubtless one of the main drivers and re-used arguments, the technical challenges and increasing specialisations also motivate more inter-organizational collaboration to address future welfare challenges. Yet, as illustrated in this thesis, such PPPs are not self-running arrangements that, once structured and signed, reach their objectives without further work. However, we still know little of the ongoing processes and while the dissertation has shed light on some of them, challenges and structural conditions as well as technical conditions may differ and are, as outlined above, contingent on the concrete setting and situation.

Particularly, the introduction of new procurement rules in the European Union would be an interesting field of study in which to explore how they are used and experienced by the participating providers and procuring public managers. Moreover, useful insights for both legislators and practitioners may also be gained by focusing on the losers of bidding processes. As an industrial PhD, I was involved in a number of bidding processes and while price and quality were generally used as ‘objective’ criteria in procurement processes, disqualifications from the bidding process, due to minor formal mistakes, were not unusual. Yet, what is it that creates such scepticism (or fear) towards a new, and in this case private, provider? How is it possible that such attitudes emerge and establish themselves? Rather than assuming simple answers (e.g. anything new is bad, for-profit is bad) an explorative study can provide nuanced insights into the every-day challenges of public contractors and how they try to enable continuity rather than change.

With regard to inter-organizational trusting, it has been indicated above that future research may contribute with more nuanced insights by actively focusing on three differing dimensions of contingency: the social, the factual and the time dimension. The latter have been specified in a partnership setting by Andersen (2006, 2012) and are inspired by Luhmann (1997: 1136). While ‘time’ is specifically addressed in this thesis the social and the factual are combined when referring to ‘space’. Using these three forms of contingency when analysing trusting processes

in inter-organizational settings may enrich how differing experiences are related to shorter and/or longer partnerships (time), strong and/or weak relational contracts (factual), fast growing and/or stable partners (social). The latter would also be useful for exploring whether and how differing PPP-tasks are related to differing potentials for standardization and eventual choice of the contractual form. Thus, it would be interesting to explore PPPs concerned with differing tasks in one and the same country and in turn also to compare PPPs from differing countries where tasks are more similar than the one's in this thesis. Finally, the increasing number of innovation PPPs would be an interesting case for research on trust given their inherent contingency and difficulty to plan and specify the outcome.

Finally, the increasingly interconnected and globalized world does not least ask for more attention towards nationally differing experiences of trust, trustworthiness and assurance. Most Danish people that have been in contact with German business practices usually told me that there was low trust in the German system and there were so many documents and rules that had to be met. Yet, the analysis in this dissertation has outlined that trust was indeed important for German managers, and detailed contracts and comprehensive procurement procedures did not compensate for the need to suspend doubts for inevitably remaining and awaiting future uncertainty. While studies of national differences are not able to provide a ten-step prescription of how to build trust in Germany, Denmark or any other country (at least not from a processual perspective) it can provide useful insights into the emerging patterns that (re)shape assurance as well as trust and that can be used as inspirational guidelines for international firms and/or firms that want to become international.

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## **PART II    PPPS & THE NEED, DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF TRUSTING**

- Article 1:    An excursion into the public-private partnership jungle: Stay precise and keep on mapping!
- Article 2:    Embedding trust in time and space: Taking process seriously in inter-organizational trust research
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# **Article 1: An excursion into the public-private partnership jungle: Stay precise and keep on mapping!**

Forthcoming in:

*International Public Management Review*

## **ABSTRACT**

While the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) is doubtless the most visible Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in the public debate it is by no means the only one. A number of scholars have outlined the ambiguity of the PPP concept beyond PFIs and pointed to the multiplicity of differing types and understandings. Thus, when examining up close, the PPP concept seems to cover a jungle of arrangements and settings. However, inductive explorations across disciplinary and professional borders are still scarce. This article addresses this lack and reviews more than 100 publications for their PPP concepts and classifications. Following, the article first of all identifies the emergence of two dimensions that are differently emphasized by the proposed PPP definitions (1) the co-responsibility dimension and (2) the relational governance dimension. Second, the article finds two differing approaches within each dimension being the interventionist and marketization approach within the co-responsibility dimension and the structural and managerial approach in the relational governance dimension. Third, the reviewed variety of classifications illustrates the infinitive number of criteria that can be used to order the within-concept variety. Thus, while the developed map in this article highlights some (re)occurring and uniting patterns it also points to the inevitable ambiguity of the PPP concept and consequently encourages scholars to stay precise and keep on mapping.

## **Keywords:**

Public-private partnership, review, inductive

## INTRODUCTION

Public-Private Partnership (PPP) is one of the most ambiguous, contested, and popular concepts of the last three decades. Although “PPPs usually mean heterogeneity, not tidiness” (Bovaird, 2004, p. 203), one approach seems to overshadow the current debate on PPPs: the UK’s Private Finance Initiative (PFI), launched in 1992, whose name Tony Blair switched successfully to “PPP” five years later (Ghobadian, Gallear, O'Regan, & Viney, 2004). These PFI/PPPs are mostly used in an infrastructure setting and are hardly restricted to the UK, as “many countries were adopting the PFI approach and calling the multitude of projects that followed in its wake PPPs” (R. Wettenhall, 2010, p. 24). The dominance of these PFI/PPP schemes is reflected in a wide body of literature on infrastructure PPPs, including scientific articles (e.g. Koppenjan, 2005; Zhang, 2005), books (e.g. Grimsey & Lewis, 2004), international consulting reports (e.g. Eggers & Startup, 2006; PwC, 2005), and publications from international organizations (e.g. Delmon, 2010; OECD, 2013a; UNECE, 2000; United Nations ESCAP, 2011).

However, while evidently being a highly visible PPP form, such long-term infrastructure projects have received much critique, not least with respect to their use of the “partnership” term. For example, Klijn and Teisman (2005) have argued that these types of projects are nothing “but a revamped form of tendering” (p. 103), while Wettenhall (2010) has stated that “much serious analysis shows that many of them [PFIs] do not function like partnerships at all” (p. 24). The literature’s critique also points to opposing or at least differing PPP conceptualizations beyond PFI-specific understandings. Consequently, a number of scholars have pointed out that PPP the concept goes beyond PFIs (e.g. Hodge & Greve, 2007; Li & Akintoye, 2003; McQuaid, 2010). For example, Wettenhall (2010) has explored the existence of partnership settings long before the PFI initiative was launched, while Bovaird (2010) and Linder (1999) identify the many differing ideological and theoretical ideas represented in the PPP concept over time and these are by no means restricted to a single PPP model. Weihe (2008) has also contributed to the breadth discussion by exploring how differing research streams have created divergent conceptualizations of PPP. Thus, when examining up close, the PPP concept seems to cover a jungle of arrangements and settings.

Perplexity about PPP meanings and PPP classifications beyond PFI/PPPs has led many scholars to conclude that “the term suffers from a lack of specificity” (Buse & Walt, 2000, p. 550), while some have even called for “an authoritative definition or a classification of PPP” (Weihe, 2008,

p. 430). Yet others stress that “[i]t is not necessary that these meanings be standardized, only that we always explore what they are in specific contexts” (Bovaird, 2004, p. 213). In other words, when accepting the ambiguity of the concept, we are required to be precise and explicit about the chosen definition and its relation to other meanings.

While the authors referenced above provide valuable insights into the variety of meanings that have been ascribed to the PPP concept, there has been little focus on inductively mapping the constitutive assumptions behind current PPP conceptualizations across disciplinary and professional borders and neither has the variety of existing classifications been explored. Yet, just because definitions may be used at different ends of the jungle, one should not preclude that they are co-created and/or share any assumptions about the PPP concept and its within variety.

This article addresses the need for a more explorative and integrative literature review by analyzing 113 publications, including the 50 most cited international journal articles on PPPs, chapters from high-impact PPP books, and publications from international players who are actively involved in PPPs (see below for more details about selection criteria). Based on this wide array of resources, the article asks two questions: (1) how are differing assumptions about the PPP concept reflected in differing delineation practices and (2) what are the main classifications of PPPs within and across differing conceptualizations of PPP?

The article reaches five key conclusions. First, there is small but nevertheless common ground when defining PPPs as collective, sector-crossing arrangements that fulfill a public task. Yet, beyond this shared assumptions, there is a variety of meanings that have been ascribed to the PPP concept. However, second, the multiplicity of definitions coalesce around two main dimensions. One strand of conceptualizations, which includes PFI/PPPs, defines PPPs with respect to the distribution of responsibilities between the partners, while the other highlights the relational dimension of PPPs. Third, while the first co-responsibility dimension focuses most on the partner level, thus the responsibilities assumed by the individual partners, the second relational governance dimension is mainly concerned with the partnership level, thus the degree of actual collaboration. The review demonstrates that, while both inherently part of the PPP concept, the two dimensions conflict when the PPP is mapped on a continuum between public and private provision. Fourth, the review identifies four differing approaches: the marketization and interventionist approaches, which relate to the co-responsibility dimension, and the structural and managerial approaches, which relate to the relational governance dimension. Fifth

and finally, the overview of the many classifications illustrates that besides some (re)occurring patterns the PPP concept remains ambiguous and conceptual clarity and explicit practices remain a prerequisite when placing and classifying PPPs in the wider field of public-private arrangements.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: It begins with specifying the central concepts of this article – being concept itself and classification. This is followed by an introduction of the analytical perspective used throughout the review. The subsequent section discusses the selection process before the analysis presents the findings of the review, beginning with the PPP concept and followed up by the PPP classifications. Finally, conclusion summarizes the main findings.

## **CONCEPTS AND CLASSIFICATION**

This first section discusses the theoretical background and understanding of “concepts” and “classifications”. Concepts are omnipresent in human communication: without them we would not be able to “relate certain phenomena to each other [while] keeping others apart” (Dingwerth & Pattberg, 2006, p. 186). They are distinctions, and by creating an inside and an outside, concepts “fulfil the central function of ordering and structuring our perception of the world” (ibid.), which makes them fundamental tools not only in the social sciences, but also in everyday language. In the case of PPPs, it has been argued that “the concept is created just as much, probably even more, by the practical use as by the scientific use” (E. Klijn, 2010, p. 69). The latter observation supports the inclusion of a wide variety of sources in this literature review.

While concepts aim to order our world, they unavoidably remain unfixed and open for interpretation, contestation, and change. Yet, in order to be recognized as currently available, a concept needs to create some “outside” and “inside” that can be identified correspondingly by differing perspectives. In fact, if a concept were to embrace literally everything, it would make its existence dispensable by not being delineable from anything outside at all. The more a concept is stretched, the more it loses in connotative precision—hence, “saying less, and ... saying less in a far less precise manner” (Sartori, 1970, p. 1035). It is this exact phenomenon that the PPP concept has been criticized for. On the other hand, if we were to introduce new terms for every difference, a confusing mass of concepts would quickly accumulate. Consequently, only concepts that are neither too flexible nor too precise have the capacity to structure and order our observations (Dingwerth & Pattberg, 2006). While a discussion of the

current “stretch” of the PPP term may be advisable and useful, it should be based upon an understanding of the breadth and variation of usages. Moreover, any such discussion should be cautious about neglecting or ignoring these variations in favor of one theoretical understanding or specific setting and area.

Let us now turn to the formation of classifications, which is a well-developed practice within social and natural sciences. Just as with concepts, classifications play a central role in structuring and ordering our world, as they relate certain things to each other and keep other things apart. In this way “language builds up classification schemes to differentiate objects by ‘gender’ ... or by number; forms to make statements of action as against statements of being; modes of indicating degrees of social intimacy, and so on” (Luckmann, 1992, p. 41). Usually, scholars distinguish between two approaches, classifications and taxonomies. Within classifications, classes are identified based on conceptual ideal types, while taxonomies focus on patterns emerging from within empirical cases and observations. In practice the two often merge, and for simplification the article uses the term “classification” throughout.

## **SECOND-ORDER OBSERVATION AS AN ANALYTICAL POINT OF DEPARTURE**

In this section, I will present the analytical approach taken in this article. Let me begin by outlining the general ontological assumptions that guide the literature review. This article follows a pragmatic orientation where no single “Truth” exists; rather, truth is what everyday practices and experiences allow for, and there may be many different truths. Thus, while dominant patterns emerge and are (re)produced, they are inherently contingent. There is no final structure or hidden reality that needs to be revealed. It follows that there is no objectivity, but neither is there a purely subjective meaning. Rather, the world is not only inherently contingent but also relational: any individual statement always relates to its embedding meanings, structures, and possibilities.

For the literature review these assumptions have three specific implications. First, as already outlined above, any PPP concept and/or classification is but one way of observing and ordering. Second, whatever is excluded is not absent: it creates the inside by staying outside. Third, there is no place outside society from which one can observe ongoing processes. The implication for this article is that the review it presents is just as much a part of the definitory and classificatory practices as any of the reviewed publications.

The review does, however, distinguish itself from existing overviews in two essential ways. First, it goes beyond mere descriptive overviews by questioning assumptions that guide the reviewed conceptualizations and classifications. Second, it explores current meanings and orderings from within the concepts and classifications rather than by assuming *a priori* criteria (i.e. history, research stream, ideology). In other words, similarities and differences are created as the result of the analytical process rather than being the point of departure. In other words, the article pursues a “second-order observation” that analyses how meanings and orderings are established as but one approach of many possible ways of observation (Luhmann 2001). It follows that, while pointing to some emerging constitutive conditions for the PPP concept, the review does not itself establish a definition. While making a strong case for conceptual clarity, it leaves the choice of the specific conceptualization open to the reader and future user.

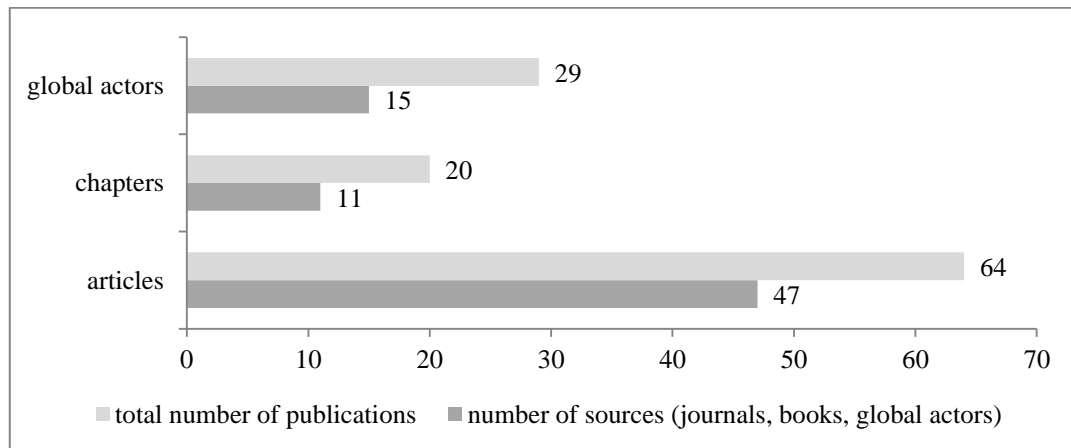
### **SAMPLING AND ANALYZING DEFINITIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS**

Given the purpose to identify definitory and classificatory patterns across disciplines and professions, the ideal aim would be to search “for whatever variation in usage ... formal definition [and classification] might exist within a language region” (Gerring & Barresi, 2003, p. 206). However, it would be naive to believe that a full sampling of all usages is (a) possible and (b) manageable. Therefore, the focus is limited to widespread or diffused concepts and classifications and thereby also the dominating patterns. Furthermore, the empirical material is limited to written documents, leaving oral everyday usages outside. Lastly, the focus is on the global English-speaking community. Hence, specific usages of the PPP concept in individual countries have been ignored unless they are discussed within the global context (as is done, for example, with the conceptualizations of the Canadian Council for P3 or the UK definition of PFI/PPPs).

The review includes three main types of publications. First, the review contains (a) 64 journal articles of which, following Web of Science, 50 are the most frequently cited articles that have PPP in their title. The additional articles have been identified by using Google and following references as to compensate for the eventual bias of Web of Science towards US-based journals and natural sciences. Additionally, the review encompasses (b) 20 chapters or sections from high-impact books on PPPs and (c) 29 publications from international organizations, which were partly referenced by the above articles and chapters and partly supported by a qualitative identification of global actors involved in the regulation, development, and/or implementation of

PPPs. Figure 1 provides an overview of the number of articles, chapters and global-actor publications compared to the number of sources (i.e. journals, books, global actors).

**Figure 1: Overview of reviewed publications and sources**



Appendix 1 provides a more detailed overview of the 113 identified publications, including the number of citations in Web of Science and Google when available. It should be mentioned that the number of citations is of course tentative given the differing “methods” for including references: Web of Science restricts its findings to journal articles, while Google is broader, yet the actual selection method for Google is difficult to identify. Overall, neither of them is very effective in including printed publications (such as books) and/or publications by international actors. Generally, the quantitative differences between Web of Science and Google point to their differing inclusion strategies, but for this review total number of citations is less important than the fact that they are referred to frequently. While the number of quotations may thus give a rough impression on their relative influence, this article focuses on the meanings in the identified publications, not their relative weight against each other. While the latter may be a very interesting “network” analysis, it lies outside the scope of this review.

Computer software Nvivo 10 was used to create an overview of all the identified definitions and classifications. First of all, definitory and classificatory passages were transferred into an Excel spreadsheet before importing it into Nvivo 10. Thereafter, the definitions were inductively coded for their defining elements. The software facilitated the subsequent process of grouping the differences as well as similarities, resulting in a map of the most central variations that will be presented below. While further differentiations are of course possible, the focus has been on the most prevalent and significant deviations. Having reviewed the concepts, a second analysis

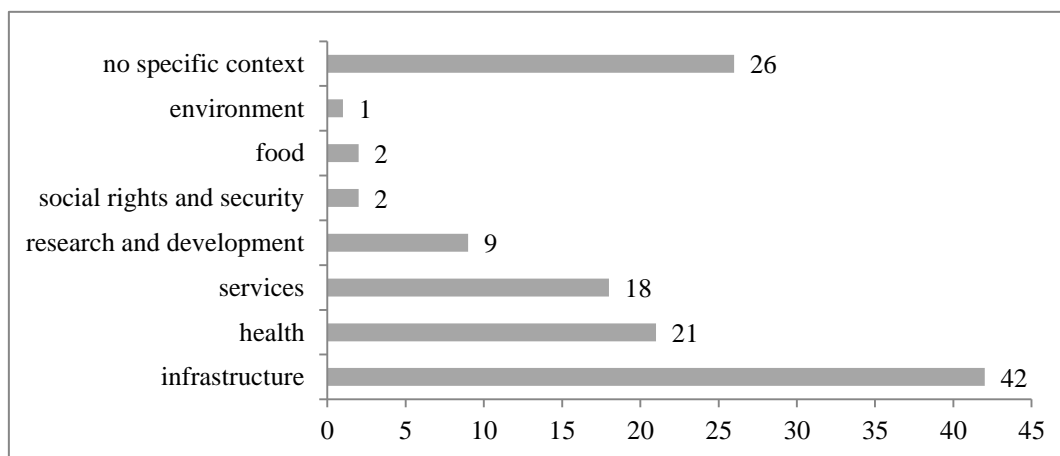


focused on the classifications. Here, it was the underlying criteria that were central to the inductive coding process. Once more the analysis was facilitated by Nvivo10 as to create an overview of the differences as well as similarities and relate them to the earlier identified map of definitory practices.

## MAPPING THE PPP JUNGLE

As outlined above, this analysis is an inductive attempt to create an overview of currently used PPP definitions and classifications across fields of research and practice. A first review of the identified publications illustrates that the term is applied to a wide variety of settings. While infrastructure projects dominate, there are also significant numbers of publications focusing on health, public services, and research & development (R&D). A small number of the publications explore PPPs in a food, environment, and social rights/security context. Finally, a significant number of the publications are context-unspecific: that is, the definitions do not refer to any explicit setting. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of the PPP term's usage by context.

**Figure 2: Usages of PPP concept by context<sup>a</sup>**



<sup>a</sup> Note: some publications refer to more than one setting and are therefore included several times.

However, just because PPP conceptualizations and classifications are used in differing contexts, this does not necessarily imply differing understandings and/or classifications. To explore the emerging definitory and classificatory patterns in the PPP literature, the following analysis answers two questions:

- (1) How are differing assumptions about the PPP concept reflected in differing delineation practices?

- (2) What are the main categorizations of PPPs within and across the different understandings of the PPP concept?

### **(1) The PPP Concept**

As indicated earlier, the literature has emphasized the ambiguity of the PPP concept, arguing that the PPP term is overworked (2005) and has been used to cover “virtually every government initiative..., a practice that trivializes the term” (Allan, 1999, p. 7). In other words, we may question whether PPP represents a distinct concept at all or instead merely exists as a brand (Klijn, 2010) or language game (Hodge & Greve, 2007). At least within a number of medical publications the latter seems to be the case, as they mainly use PPP as a label without content, remaining very loose about its meaning (see also Appendix 1). However, more than 90 publications use a distinct PPP definition and ascribe some explicit meanings to the concept, thereby distinguishing it from other closely related phenomena.

A search for a common ground across all identified definitions led to a broad but nevertheless shared understanding, where PPPs (1) are collective as opposed to individual actions, (2) include actors from the public and private sector as opposed to sector-internal cooperation, and (3) perform a public as opposed to private task. Hence, there seems to be agreement about distinguishing PPPs from full privatization and/or private self-regulation, as well as from the in-house provision of services by a public agency. Also PPPs are distinct from private alliances and networks between public organizations. Although such a common ground has some delineation potential, it leaves a lot of room for variation and conflicting definitions.

An immediate apparent source of divergence is the inclusion versus exclusion of not-for-profit organizations as private sector organizations. While about one third of the reviewed publications consider not-for-profits to be private organizations, two thirds exclude them from their conceptualizations of PPPs. Yet, when it comes to delineating PPPs from other phenomena, this disagreement is not a central issue and will therefore not be elaborated further here.

In the following four sub-sections, the review addresses the main sources for divergence and convergence. To start, the commonly used differentiation between broad and narrow definitions will be presented. It will be argued that this split may be helpful to create an initial overview, yet is not sufficient to explain how the concept is related differently to its surroundings. Rather, two different dimensions are identified as the main source of divergence and are presented separately

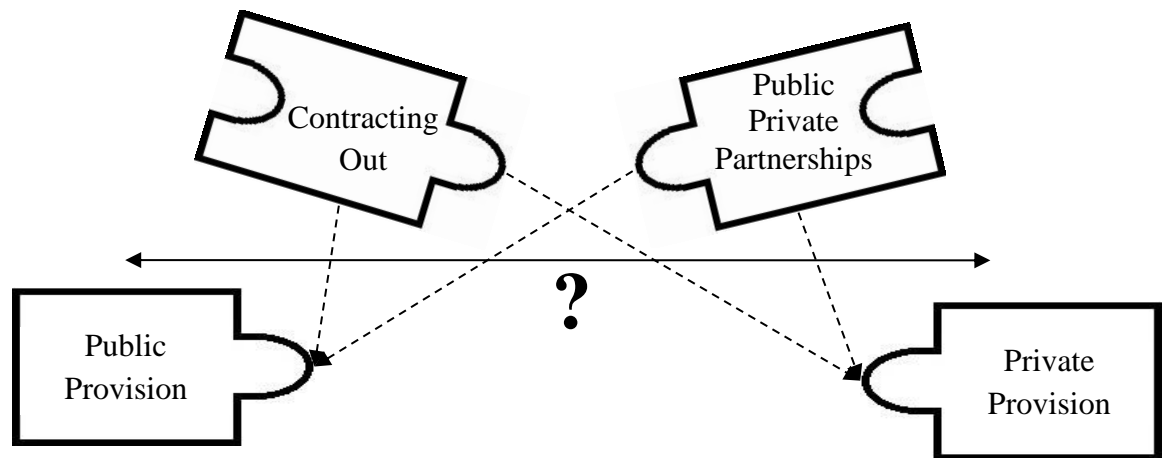
in the second and third sub-section. Finally, the inherent relationship between these two dimensions is discussed.

*Broad versus Narrow Definitions.* Frequently scholars draw a distinction between broad and narrow definitions of PPPs (Weihe, 2008). Consequently, there is indeed a first, rather small, group of conceptualizations drawing a very broad line by sufficing with the earlier presented common ground. Thus, they use the PPP concept to refer to almost any situation where the private sector participates in the provision of a public service. It has been pointed out elsewhere (Skelcher 2005) that such broad usages of the PPP term seem to dominate within the US, as represented by Savas (2000), Linder and Roseneau (2000) and also Minow (2003).

However, there are also some non-American authors that make use of this broader conceptualization. For example, the Germans Börzel and Risse (2005) only exclude lobbying, advocacy activities, and self-coordination of markets from their understanding of cooperative arrangements, i.e. PPPs (p. 198). In a similar vein, Chong and colleagues (2006) refer to PPPs as “a range of organizational arrangements between fully public provision of services and complete privatization” (p. 150) in a French context, and Skelcher’s (2005) chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Public Management* “refer[s] to the ways in which government and private actors work together in pursuit of societal goals” (p. 348). Hence, while there may be a tradition of broad conceptualizations in the US, it is not limited to that country, just as there are a number of American publications referring to narrower PPP understandings (e.g. Bloomfield, 2006; Weiner & Alexander, 1998).

While the distinction in narrow and broad definitions provides a first useful map of diverging definitory practices, it falls short of explaining another pattern that divides the reviewed publications and cuts across the narrow and broad definition. When placing PPPs on the continuum between public and private provision of services, there is one group of conceptualizations that situates PPPs closer to private provision and outsourcing arrangements closer to public provision, whereas another group places PPPs closer to public provision and outsourcing arrangements closer to private provision. This split is illustrated in Figure 3, where the question mark indicates that the focus seems to be on differing dimensions when situating PPPs on the continuum.

**Figure 3: PPP delineations along the public private continuum**



Thus, while the distinction between broad and narrow definitions provides a first overview, it is insufficient to explain the diverging delineation practices. Here, the focus on differing dimensions seems to be more useful and the review finds that the first group of publications focuses on the distribution of responsibility (finance, ownership, risk, etc.) while the second group emphasizes the degree of collaboration (joint decision-making, governance, etc.). In the following, the first dimension is referred to as the *co-responsibility dimension* and the other is denoted as the *relational governance dimension*. While Hodge and Greve (2007) have outlined the existence of two dimensions in the PPP concept earlier, their focus is on financial and organizational aspects. Although to some extent similar, the following presentation of the two dimensions in separate sub-sections emphasizes that variations go beyond mere financial and organizational references and are not least related to a shift in focus from the partner to the partnership level.

*The Co-Responsibility Dimension.* When focusing on the co-responsibility dimension of PPPs, definitions delineate PPPs by referring to the number of responsibilities being shared and/or distributed between the involved public versus private organizations. These responsibilities may include risks, ownership, financial revenue, involvement and/or tasks. In contrast to outsourcing arrangements, PPPs are defined to transfer more responsibility to the private sector and thus are often described as “extensions of contracting-out” (Bettignies & Ross, 2004) and “long-term contracts” (Grimsey & Lewis, 2002, 2005; Hodge, 2004; PwC, 2005). The greater private responsibility is created by bundling tasks (Bettignies & Ross, 2004; Hart, 2003; Martimort & Pouyet, 2008; UNECE, 2000, 2008) and the transfer of financial as well as operational risks

(Bettignies & Ross, 2004; Fiscals Affairs Department, 2004; Ke, Wang, Chan, & Lam, 2010) for all these tasks. While some authors even argue for a change in ownership structures (Grimsey & Lewis, 2002; Martimort & Pouyet, 2008; OECD, 2013a), others point out that “[u]nder PPPs, there is no transfer of ownership and the public sector remains accountable” (UNECE, 2008, p.5).

Generally, the focus is not so much on how the organizations cooperate, but on the fact that they both contribute to a given project. Thereby PPPs provide a new way of shifting risks, incentives, and costs between the sectors, leading to more efficient and effective solutions for society. A focus on PPPs as co-responsibility arrangements is mainly pursued by two streams in the literature. First, there are a number of scholarly publications with a financial and economic perspective, being primarily publications on PFI/PPPs in infrastructure and R&D (Bettignies & Ross, 2004; Grimsey & Lewis, 2002, 2005; Hart, 2003; Hodge, 2004; Kwak, Chih, & Ibbs, 2009; Link & Scott, 2001; Martimort & Pouyet, 2008; Nijkamp, van der Burch, & Vindigni, 2002; Spackman, 2002; Stiglitz & Wallsten, 1999; Wheeler & Seth, 2001; Zhang, 2005). Second, such an approach also dominates amongst international organizations and banks (EIB, 2004; Fiscals Affairs Department, 2004; OECD, 2008, 2011, 2013b; Temesgen, 2011; UNECE, 2008; United Nations ESCAP, 2011; World Bank, 2006, 2009) and consulting firms such as Deloitte, PwC, and KPMG (Eggers & Startup, 2006; KMPG Global; PwC, 2005). These two streams are far from independent, but frequently refer to each other in their definitory outlines.

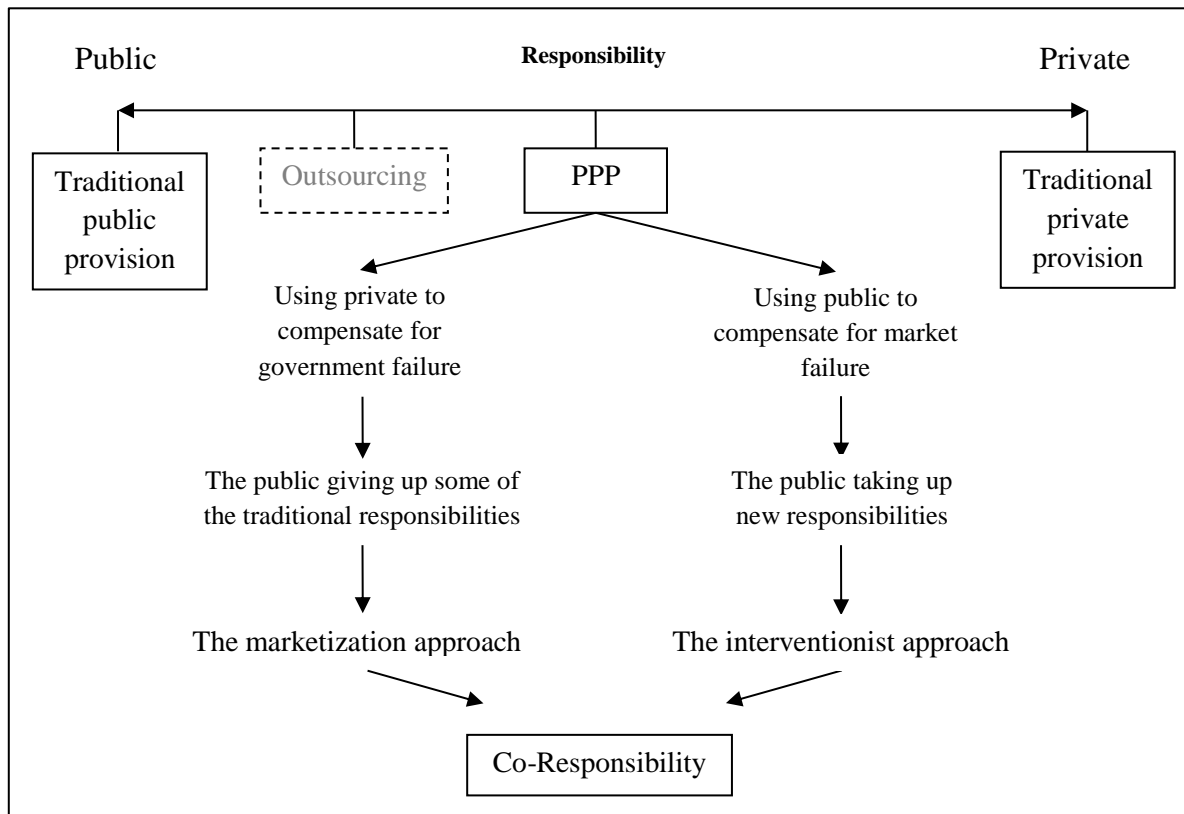
Besides the overall agreement on PPPs as a new means of responsibility sharing/distribution (sharing), there is an interesting divergence in this group of publications which surfaces when they specify the public tasks that are to be fulfilled by the PPP. A number of definitions use the adjective “traditional” to refer to the task’s original public character, which is at least partly challenged in PPPs when private actors assume some of the responsibility for such tasks (Bettignies & Ross, 2004; Grimsey & Lewis, 2004; Hodge, 2004; Zhang, 2005). Consequently, they imply a failure or deficiency of the state which can be addressed by the inclusion of private actors, i.e. using the market to create more efficient solutions (European Commission, 2003; Fiscals Affairs Department, 2004; Hammami, Ruhashyankiko, & Yehoue, 1999; OECD, 2013a). Generally, publications following such a *marketization approach* towards PPPs focus on (traditionally) strong states that have assumed a wide range of responsibilities which can now be minimized through market inclusion. By observing PPPs as one way to commercialize the

public sector, such definitions can be embedded in what has popularly been referred to as “New Public Management” (Bovaird, 2010; Grimsey & Lewis, 2004).

The latter view clearly dominates the literature, yet the opposite argument also exists, especially within R&D publications. While they too “focus on funding, high-risk and high-cost projects” (Wheeler & Seth, 2001, p. 729), they refer to PPPs as “a new and effective response to the medical needs associated with low commercial returns, needs that are not being addressed through competitive industrial R&D” (ibid.). Thus, they argue, the PPP task has not been addressed sufficiently by the private market and therefore the state or often an inter-governmental organization intervenes to contravene market failure (Audretsch, Link, & Scott, 2002; Croft, 2005; Newell, Pande, Baral, Bam, & Malla, 2004; Nwaka & Ridley, 2003; Reich, 2000). Not surprisingly, these *interventionist approaches* are mainly situated in settings with little government influence, such as the transnational sphere and countries with weak or minimal states. While such an approach does not oppose the efficiency and value-for-the-money paradigm of new public management, they differ in their view that public responsibilities need to be built rather than minimized in order to create viable and effective solutions for society.

Irrespective of the chosen approach, it is common for definitions that focus on the co-responsibility dimension to use the PPP concept for referring to arrangements where both public and private organizations assume some kind of responsibility for the regulation, implementation, and/or provision of a public task. The mapping within the co-responsibility dimension and the two identified approaches towards the PPP task are summarized in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Different assumptions within the co-responsibility dimension**



*The Relational Governance Dimension.* The second way of delineating PPPs from their outside primarily concerns the degree of collaboration. When emphasizing a relational governance dimension, the focus is on actual interaction (Mitchell-Weaver & Manning, 1991; Teisman & Klijn, 2002), horizontal power relations (Miraftab, 2004), trust (Bloomfield, 2006; Entwistle & Martin, 2005; Osborne, 2006, p. 383; R. Wettenhall, 2010), and joint governance (Börzel & Risse, 2005; Mitchell-Weaver & Manning, 1991; R. Wettenhall, 2003). Consequently, PPPs are distinct from outsourcing arrangements in that they create a joint and interactive relationship rather than an arm's length relationship, where the private partner is left to be market-driven and the public partner uses hierarchical controls to monitor the private partner. In other words, PPPs are related to a network mode of governance (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998) and thereby placed closer to public provision than outsourcing arrangements.

The main proponents of more relational definitions of the PPP concept are situated in the public management literature (Klijn & Teisman, 2000, 2003; McQuaid, 2000, 2010; Noble & Jones, 2006, Selsky & Parker 2005) and governance literature (Andonova, 2010; Mitchell-Weaver & Manning, 1991), including publications on global health PPPs (Buse & Harmer, 2007; Widdus, 2001, 2003). Beginning with the public management literature, a focus on PPPs as relational

governance mechanisms usually entails a critique of the previously outlined definitions that emphasize the co-responsibility dimension. This may be illustrated by Klijn and Teisman's (2005) critique of PFI/PPPs where they argue that "the level of co-production is low and the risks are mostly clearly shared among partners in a strong contractual manner" (p. 114). In a similar vein, Rosenau (1999) introduces the notion of "authentic partnering" that, "in theory, involves close collaboration and the combination of the strengths of both the private sector ... and the public sector" (p. 12). In other words, the critique entails that it is not enough to refer to *sharing* when what is described is mainly a *distribution* of risks and responsibility between partners. Rather, joint decision-making, close organizational relationships, and collaborative management are concerned central to the definition of PPPs.

Turning to the public governance strand, these scholars focus on how rules and norms are increasingly co-created by state and non-state actors (Börzel & Risse, 2005; Garcia Martinez, Fearne, Caswell, & Henson, 2007; McKinsey, 2009a, 2009b; Schäferhoff, Campe, & Kaan, 2009). This strand typically focuses on transnational PPPs and includes mainly inter-governmental organizations as public actors and civil as well as societal organizations as private actors. They create a PPP in- and outside by referring to the sharing of autonomy and authority. In this vein, Schäferhoff and colleagues (2009) argue that "PPPs are therefore an expression of the ongoing reconfiguration of authority in world politics" (p. 145) and Börzel and Risse (2005) state that the private actor gains more autonomy when a task is delegated, i.e. outsourced, compared to arrangements of co-regulation, i.e. narrow PPPs, where autonomy is shared (p. 200). It should be noted that governance literature refers both to broader understandings, including all kinds of actors and autonomy-distributing arrangements (ibid.), and narrower understandings, in which only actual co-regulation is thought of as PPP (Andonova, 2010; Mitchell-Weaver & Manning, 1991).

While the outlined publications generally agree that PPPs present a specific form of governance and management, there is one main divergence regarding the "collaboration". On the one hand, there is a *structural approach* assuming that institutional structures such as the creation of a joint organization lead to more partnership behavior than contractual structures or separate offices (Buse & Walt, 2000; Greve & Hodge, 2005; Klijn & Teisman, 2005). On the other hand, there is a *managerial approach* arguing that mutual PPPs are created by having joint managerial strategies and interaction rather than implementing the right organizational form (Osborne &



Murry, 2000; Skelcher, 2010; G. Weihe, 2010). While the first approach aims to establish a positive correlation between organizational structures and the creation of PPPs, the other refers to a positive correlation between management and PPPs. Although the two approaches lead to differing emphases, they may and do indeed co-exist in definitions as for example in Buse and Watt (Buse & Harmer, 2007), where the PPP term is used “to describe relatively institutionalized initiatives ... in which public and for-profit private sector organizations have a voice in collective decision-making” (p. 259).

Generally, the relational governance approach highlights PPPs as the “third way” making up for market and state failure (e.g. Schäferhoff et al., 2009). In other words, they go beyond a focus on efficiency by emphasizing joint value creation and relationships (Osborne, 2006). These newer tendencies have been increasingly considered as a shift towards new public governance (Osborne 2010), although some authors seem to include the latter in the new public management paradigm (e.g. Grimesy and Lewis 2004).

*Discussing and Summarizing the Two Dimensions.* Having presented the two dimensions separately, let us now turn to their conflicting yet inherent co-existence. The conflict between the two has been illustrated in their differing delineation practices, placing PPPs closer and further from public provision than outsourcing arrangements. The source for divergence has been shown to lie in the differing dimensions ascribed to the continuum, that is, responsibility in the former and degree of interaction and decision-making in the latter. Going one step further, it may be argued that the co-responsibility dimension primarily refers to the partner level when focusing on how responsibilities are shared/distributed across partners. The relational governance dimension, on the other hand, refers to the partnership level when focusing on joint and mutual decision-making. Clearly, a PPP requires both a partnership as well as autonomous and responsible partners. It follows that they are inherently related even as they must remain separate dimensions: there is no partnership without partners and no partners without a partnership.

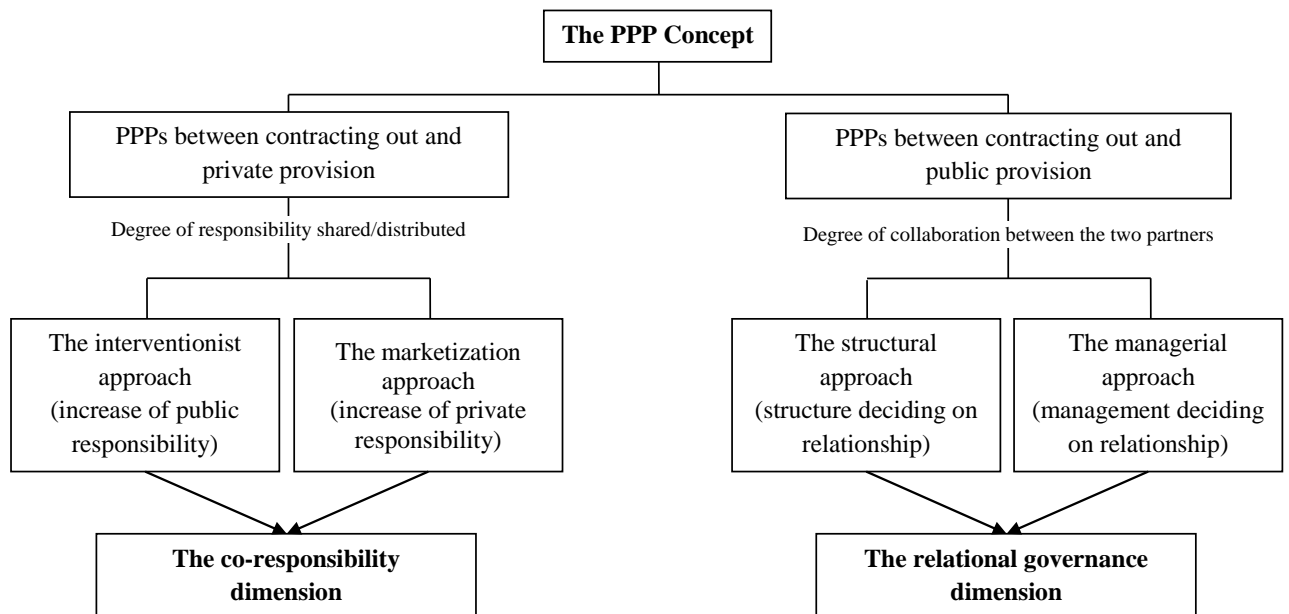
From this perspective we may interpret Klijn and Teisman’s (2005) previously presented criticism of PFI/PPPs as a critique of too much focus on clear and detailed risk sharing undermining the partnership relation. On the other hand, an almost exclusive focus on the partnership level can also be precarious. For example, Buse and Harmer (2007) argue that

[p]artnerships require all participants to span organizational boundaries ... and to devote extraordinary time and energy to partnership activities, often at the expense of corporate interests. Moreover, contributions to partnerships are often *not* explicitly recognized and rewarded in the parent organizations. (p. 268, italics added)

Yet, when the partnership level is given priority there is a risk of dissolving partners and turning the PPP into a partner-independent, autonomous organization.

In other words, while the two dimensions have been presented separately, most definitions include both of them to some degree, yet, the tendency is to emphasize one over the other. Only few, especially public management and governance scholars, explicitly refer to both of them ( e.g. Buse & Walt, 2000; Buse & Harmer, 2007; Greve & Hodge, 2005; Grimsey & Lewis, 2004; Klijn & Teisman, 2005; G. Weihe, 2010; R. Widdus, 2003). Still, they cannot escape that the co-existence of these dimensions also embodies an inherent conflict when it comes to delineating the PPP concept from its surrounding. The two dimensions and their approaches are summarized in Figure 5 below.

**Figure 5: Overview of dimensions and approaches used to define the PPP concept**



## **(2) Reviewing PPP Classifications**

Having outlined two emerging dimensions and four differing approaches, it may be argued that the PPP concept is less ambiguous than it initially appeared. However, while the proposed map (see Figure 5 above) illustrates some (re)occurring patterns concerning how differing in- and outsides are created, the “insides” of the concept are another source of diversity. In other words, when focusing on the many proposed classificatory schemes of PPP, there seems to be an indefinite number of criteria. In total almost 50 classifications were identified in the review and in the following three sub-sections, differing ordering criteria will be presented according to their relationship to earlier outlined dimensions.

*Classifications within the Co-Responsibility Dimension.* It has already been mentioned that there are various ways of “measuring” responsibility. Along these lines, classifications emphasizing the co-responsibility dimension mostly order differing PPP types along a continuum between public and private risk, ownership, and general responsibility. To distinguish between differing PPP types, classifications most frequently refer to differing combinations of involved tasks such as design, finance, build, operate, maintain, own, lease, and transfer (CCPPP; Kwak et al., 2009; Nijkamp et al., 2002). By combining these in differing ways a number of PPP types have been identified (e.g. design-build-maintain, design-build-operate-maintain, build-own-operate). In addition to the task combinations identified above, another frequently used PPP type is concession, while broader definitions also include service and management contracts as well as privatization (divestiture) in their PPP classification (Eggers & Startup, 2006; Li & Akintoye, 2003).

While scholars generally agree on how to order these differing PPP-types, the identified PPP types differ widely in number and setup. Grimsey and Lewis (2004) identify a total of sixteen types (pp. 10), while Deloitte’s research report (2006) and the International Monetary Fund (2004) classify eleven PPP models, and the often-cited typology of the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships (2014) presents eight types on their homepage. The confusion about the many abbreviations that have been applied to differing types has led Grimsey and Lewis (2004) to refer to “the ‘alphabet soup’ of acronyms” (p. 12).

Thus, while partly disagreeing on the existing types and labels, the above presented classifications share a common focus on sharing/distribution of responsibility in a given PPP project. Consistent with definitory tendencies in the co-responsibility dimension introduced earlier, these classifications are mainly used by global actors and scholars adapting an economic perspective prevalent for PFI/PPP settings while none of the R&D publications presents a specific classificatory scheme.

*Classifications within the Relational Governance Dimension.* Within the relational governance dimension there is generally less convergence about the ordering criteria. Most agreement is amongst scholars emphasizing a structural approach who generally focus on the organizational form of PPPs. Here, the main distinction has been drawn between contractual and institutional PPPs (Klijn & Teisman 2005) or concession versus alliance PPPs (Koppenjan, 2005). Yet, when focusing on the tightness of the relationship, the distinction between contract and entity is typically expanded as to allow for further classifications.

In this vein, for example Klijn (2010), while also including contracts, further identifies informal project groups and the creation of a common office when ordering different PPP models along the continuum between tight and loose organizational structures. Within the governance literature on global health PPPs Buse and Walt (2000) distinguish between an elite committee model, an NGO model, and a quasi-public authority model and order them according to the degree of participation in strategic decision-making. Another example are Buse and Waxman (2001) who classify PPPs according to their decision-making body and differ between PPPs with a secretariat within public or NGO and PPPs with a separate legal entity. Generally, these organizational classifications tend to assume that the tighter the organizational structure, the more interaction and joint decision-making will there be, yet, as illustrated above the categories are far from streamlined and contingent on context.

Publications that follow a managerial approach are even more heterogeneous. While they share a focus on management/governance style they do so in various ways. In their broader approach towards PPPs, Börzel and Risse (2005) include a number of governance schemes such as “private self-regulation in the shadow of hierarchy” and “delegation”, i.e. outsourcing, in their PPP classification and order the differing types according to the involved autonomy of the private versus the public actor (p. 200). Klijn and Teisman (2000), on the other hand, identify three different management styles that can be used in PPPs and that decide about their success:

While project management is argued to be more valuable for outsourcing projects, process management and network constitution are outlined to be decisive for the establishment of real PPPs. Finally, a number of scholars do not classify actual PPP types but rather focus on the involved managerial phases in PPPs. For example, Osborn and Murray identify five stages: the pre-contact phase, the preliminary contact phase, the negotiation phase, the implementation phase, and the evaluation phase. Weihe (2010) and Koppenjan (2005) also focus on processes, but settle with two stages, the planning or pre-contract stage and the contract or realization phase.

Thus, there are various classificatory schemes used to order PPPs according to their degree of collaboration, i.e. relational governance, and while the focus on organizational forms slightly predominates the reviewed literature, the overview clearly illustrates that there is far from consensus.

*Dimension Crossing Classifications.* Lastly, the heterogeneity of existing classification is further illustrated by the large number of classifications that crosses the earlier outlined dimensions. Beginning with Hodge and Greve (2005), they propose a classification that addresses both the co-responsibility and the relational governance dimension by including the organizational and the financial relationship. By incorporating two criteria they allow for a more nuanced ordering of PPP types.

Most classifications that cross the dimensions do not, however, address both of them but rather create some kind of overview without directly relating to the definition in the publication. One such example is the distinction between institutional versus contractual PPPs that is also used by scholars and global actors who otherwise define PPPs based on their degree of responsibility distribution. When they nevertheless use organizational form to provide an overview they do so without assuming differing partnership degrees or public/private responsibility (e.g. European Commission, 2004; Nijkamp et al., 2002; UNECE, 2008). Other commonly used criteria that are used to create an overview are the level and/or function of inter-agency cooperation (Börzel & Risse, 2005; McQuaid, 2010), the central activity undertaken (Domberger & Fernandez, 1999, Bovaird 2004), the objective of the PPP (K. Buse & Walt, 2000; McKinsey, 2009b), and the revenue source (Bovaird, 2004; S. Linder & Rosenau, 2000). It is not always clear how the differing variables overlap and/or differ, and identified types are far from neutral but usually specific to the context addressed in the papers.

Finally, there are also some classifications that remain ambiguous about the chosen criteria while concentrating on evolving PPP types – thus creating taxonomies rather than classifications. In this vein, Hodge and Greve (2007) present five emerging PPP families whereas Ghobadian and colleagues (2004) refer to five PPP types used by UK government. Thus, while there may be dominant patterns to order PPP types according to responsibility and/or organizational forms, this does not prevent other potential orderings from being used and the myriad of existing classifications and PPP types does not least illustrates the ambiguity and jungle-like appearance of the PPP concept.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article has its point of departure in the observation that, despite the existence of few explorative overviews of PPPs beyond a PFI context, an inductive map of existing definitory practices across disciplinary and professional borders is still missing. Thus, we still know little about the actual dispersion of the concept and how ascribed meanings and classifications differ, yet also converge across contexts. Furthermore, reviews usually focus on exploring conceptualizations and classifications within academic writings although it has been argued that PPP is just as much created by its practical use (Klijn 2010). The article has addressed this gap by reviewing and analyzing PPP conceptualizations and classifications in more than 100 publications and across disciplinary and professional boundaries. In the following, five main insights shall be highlighted.

First, the common ground across all publications is rather small and can be summarized in three main PPP characteristics. Following, PPPs are commonly defined as collective—as opposed to individual—actions, sector-crossing rather than sector-intern projects, and fulfilling a public rather than a private task. This common ground refers to wide range of public-private arrangements and while some authors suffice with such a broad definition most publications are more exclusive when delineating PPP from its surrounding.

Second, the review identified one main divergence when the PPP concept is delineated and related to outsourcing arrangements, public provision, and private provision. On the one hand, publications focusing on the co-responsibility dimension define PPPs as responsibility-sharing/distributing arrangements and place PPP closer to private provision than outsourcing. On the other hand, publications focusing on the relational governance dimension define PPPs as collaborative arrangements and place PPPs closer to public provision than outsourcing.

Third, it has been argued that two dimensions emphasize two different levels of the PPP and while the co-responsibility focuses on the responsibility assumed by the *individual partners*, the relational governance dimension highlights the *partnership level*. Thereby, they are both inherently related to the PPP concept since without partners there is no partnership and without partnership there are no partners. However, given the conflicting definitory practices, these two dimensions also establish a paradox that seems to be unsolvable and constitutive for the PPP concept.

Fourth, the analysis has identified four differing approaches within the identified dimensions. On the one hand, there is a difference between the interventionist approach that indicates PPPs as an increase of state intervention versus the marketization approach that considers PPPs to increase market participation, a split which is situated within the co-responsibility dimension. On the other hand, within the relational governance dimension, there is a difference between a structural approach that considers the organizational structure as central to creating partnerships versus a managerial approach that considers the processual, managerial and interpersonal relations to be critical for a partnership.

Fifth, the article has related the reviewed classifications to the identified dimensions and approaches. The review illustrates that there are a number of classifications that relate explicitly to the used definitions when ordering according to involved risks, responsibility, organizational form and management/governance style. Yet, countless additional criteria were used to order the PPP variety and even if the same criterion was used, identified types usually differ. In other words, the multiplicity of classifications is infinite and so are the PPP-types that are gathered in the concept. It follows, that there may be some dominant patterns when delineating and approaching the PPP concept, yet the within variety resembles a jungle rather than an arranged plantation.

Overall, the multiplicity of understandings and orderings highlights the need for conceptual clarity and deliberative dealings with the PPP concept and its classificatory diversity. While the developed map in this article provides a useful starting point, it has also been emphasized that there is more than one way of ordering and thus further explorations are encouraged. A review and exploration of current PPP practices, especially across national and continental borders, may further enrich and widen the current discourse on PPPs. Hence, rather than complaining about the PPP concept's ambiguity one should accept and acknowledge the diversity that will most

likely be (re)produced and, given the concept's wide diffusion, further increase. Hence, the conclusion of this review is to stay precise—but keep on mapping.

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## APPENDIX A: Overview of reviewed publications

Nr.	Authors	Pub Year	Title	Journal/ Book/ Organization	Citation WoS	Citation Google <sup>a</sup>
<b>THE 50 MOST-CITED ARTICLES USING WEB OF KNOWLEDGE SEARCHING FOR “PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP” IN THE TITLE<sup>b</sup></b>						
1	Nwaka, S; Ridley, RG	2003	Virtual drug discovery and development for neglected diseases through public-private partnerships	NATURE REVIEWS DRUG DISCOVERY	122	183
2	Buse, K; Walt, G	2000	Global public-private partnerships: part I – a new development in health?	BULLETIN OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)	87	266
3	Hodge, G; Greve, C	2007	Public-private partnerships: An international performance review	PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW	82	288
4	Hart, O	2003	Incomplete contracts and public ownership: Remarks, and an application to public-private partnerships	ECONOMIC JOURNAL	75	537
5	Minow, M.	2003	Public and Private Partnerships: Accounting for the New Religion	HAVARD LAW REVIEW ASSOCIATION	73	275
6	Crowley, WF et al.	2004	Clinical research in the United States at a crossroads – Proposal for a novel public-private partnership to establish a National Clinical Research Enterprise	JAMA-JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION	73	99
7	Buse, K; Walt, G	2000	Global public-private partnerships: part II – what are the health issues for global governance?	BULLETIN OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)	71	175
8	Widdus, R	2001	Public-private partnerships for health: their main targets, their diversity, and their future directions	BULLETIN OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)	66	215
9	Linder, SH	1999	Coming to terms with the public-private partnership – A grammar of multiple meanings	AMERICAN BEHAVIORAL SCIENTIST	58	232
10	Buse, K; Harmer, AM	2007	Seven habits of highly effective global public-private health partnerships: Practice and potential	SOCIAL SCIENCE & MEDICINE	57	135
11	Murthy, KJR et al.	2001	Public-private partnership in tuberculosis control: experience in Hyderabad, India	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TUBERCULOSIS AND LUNG DISEASE	57	100
12	Weiner, BJ; Alexander, JA	1998	The challenges of governing public-private community health partnerships	HEALTH CARE MANAGEMENT REVIEW	57	108
13	Bovaird, T	2004	Public-private partnerships: from contested concepts to prevalent practice	INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCES	56	248

Nr.	Authors	Pub Year	Title	Journal/ Book/ Organization	Citation WoS	Citation Google <sup>a</sup>
14	Buse, K; Waxman, A	2001	Public-private health partnerships: a strategy for WHO	BULLETIN OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)	56	188
15	Bazzoli, GJ	1997	Public-private collaboration in health and human service delivery: Evidence from community partnerships	MILBANK QUARTERLY	56	95
16	Yamey, G	2002	The world's most neglected diseases – Ignored by the pharmaceutical industry and by public-private partnerships	BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL	53	91
17	Zhang, XQ	2005	Critical success factors for public-private partnerships in infrastructure development	JOURNAL OF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING AND MANAGEMENT	52	190
18	Newell, JN et al.	2004	Control of tuberculosis in an urban setting in Nepal: public-private partnership	BULLETIN OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION	51	79
19	Bloomfield, P	2006	The challenging business of long-term public-private partnerships: Reflections on local experience	PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW	47	126
20	Miraftab, F	2004	Public-private partnerships – The Trojan Horse of neoliberal development?	JOURNAL OF PLANNING EDUCATION AND RESEARCH	43	123
21	Koppenjan, JFM	2005	The formation of public-private partnerships: Lessons from nine transport infrastructure projects in the Netherlands	PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	42	115
22	Klijn, EH; Teisman, GR	2003	Institutional and strategic barriers to public-private partnership: An analysis of Dutch cases	PUBLIC MONEY & MANAGEMENT	42	190
23	Golden MR et al.	2001	Partner management for gonococcal and chlamydial infection - Expansion of public health services to the private sector and expedited sex partner treatment through a partnership with commercial pharmacies	SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES	39	52
24	Reich, MR	2000	Public-private partnerships for public health	NATURE MEDICINE	39	141
25	Martimort, D; Jerome, P	2008	To build or not to build: Normative and positive theories of public-private partnerships	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATION	37	163
26	Hodge, GA	2004	The risky business of public-private partnerships	AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	35	147
27	Rosenau, PV	1999	Introduction – The strengths and weaknesses of public-private policy partnerships	AMERICAN BEHAVIORAL SCIENTIST	34	130
28	Narrod, C et al.	2009	Public-private partnerships and collective action in high value fruit and vegetable supply chains	FOOD POLICY	33	96



Nr.	Authors	Pub Year	Title	Journal/ Book/ Organization	Citation WoS	Citation Google <sup>a</sup>
29	Audretsch, DB et al.	2002	Public/private technology partnerships: evaluating SBIR-supported research	RESEARCH POLICY	31	129
30	Croft, SL	2005	Public-private partnership: from there to here	TRANSACTIONS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF TROPICAL MEDICINE AND HYGIENE	30	53
31	Schaeferhoff, M et al.	2009	Transnational Public-Private Partnerships in International Relations: Making Sense of Concepts, Research Frameworks, and Results	INTERNATIONAL STUDIES REVIEW	29	78
32	Curtis, V et al.	2007	Masters of marketing: Bringing private sector skills to public health partnerships	AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PUBLIC HEALTH	29	45
33	Garcia Martinez, M et al.	2007	Co-regulation as a possible model for food safety governance: Opportunities for public-private partnerships	FOOD POLICY	27	103
34	Deneufville, JI; Barton, SE	1987	Myths and the definition of policy problems – an exploration of home ownership and public private partnerships	POLICY SCIENCES	27	76
35	Noble, J; Jones, R.		The role of boundary-spanning managers in the establishment of public-private partnerships	PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	26	67
36	Krishna, V; Qaim, M	2007	Estimating the adoption of Bt eggplant in India: Who Benefits from public-private partnership?	FOOD POLICY	25	54
37	Ke, Y et al.	2010	Preferred risk allocation in China's public-private partnership (PPP) projects	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT	24	70
38	Rangan, S et al.	2006	Constructive partnerships: When alliances between private firms and public actors can enable creative strategies	ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT REVIEW	24	64
39	Nijkamp, P et al.	2002	A comparative institutional evaluation of public-private partnerships in Dutch urban land-use and 108revitalization projects	URBAN STUDIES	24	102
40	Kwak, YH et al.	2009	Towards a Comprehensive Understanding of Public Private Partnerships for Infrastructure Development	CALIFORNIA MANAGEMENT REVIEW	23	96
41	Chong, E et al.	2006	Public-private partnerships and prices: Evidence from water distribution in France	REVIEW OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATION	23	101
42	Widdus, R	2005	Public Private Partnerships: An overview	TRANSACTION OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF TROPICAL MEDICINE AND HYGIENE	23	49

Nr.	Authors	Pub Year	Title	Journal/ Book/ Organization	Citation WoS	Citation Google <sup>a</sup>
43	Zhang, XQ	2005	Paving the way for public-private partnerships in infrastructure development	JOURNAL OF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING AND MANAGEMENT	23	62
44	Lim, MK	2004	Shifting the burden of health care finance: a case study of public-private partnership in Singapore	HEALTH POLICY	23	71
45	Stiglitz, JE; Wallsten, SJ	1999	Public-private technology partnerships – Promises and pitfalls	AMERICAN BEHAVIORAL SCIENTIST	23	108
46	Andonova, LB	2010	Public-Private Partnerships for the Earth: Politics and Patterns of Hybrid Authority in the Multilateral System	GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS	22	56
47	de Bettignies, JE; Ross, TW	2004	The economics of public-private partnerships	CANADIAN PUBLIC POLICY-ANALYSE DE POLITIQUES	22	150
48	Link, AN; Scott, JT	2001	Public/private partnerships: stimulating competition in a dynamic market	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATION	22	80
49	Jeziersky, L	1990	Neighborhoods and public-private partnerships in Pittsburgh	URBAN AFFAIRS REVIEW	22	47
50	Wheeler, C; Berkley, S	2001	Initial lessons front public-private partnerships in drug and vaccine development	BULLETIN OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)	21	52
<b>ARTICLES &amp; BOOK CHAPTERS IDENTIFIED BY FURHTER EXPLORATIVE RESEARCH &amp;</b>						
51	Allan, J	1999	Public-Private Partnerships: A Review of Literature and Practice	Policy Paper No 4, Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy		
52	Bovaird, T	2010	Chapter: A Brief Intellectual History of the Public-Private Partnership Movement	Book: International Handbook on Public-Private Partnerships		(8)
53	Börzel, T; Risse, T	2005	Public-Private Partnerships: Effective and Legitimate Tools of Transnational Governance?	Book: Complex Sovereignty: Reconstituting Political Authority in the Twenty-first Century		(299)
54	Broadbent, J; Laughlin, R	2003	Public Private Partnerships: an Introduction	ACCOUNTING, AUDITING & ACCOUNTABILITY JOURNAL		145
55	Carroll, P; Stean P	2000	Chapter: Public-Private Partnerships: Sectoral Perspectives	Book: Public-Private Partnerships: Theory and Practice in International Perspective		
56	Domberger, S; Fernandez, P	1999	Public-Private Partnerships for Service Delivery	BUSINESS STRATEGY REVIEW		33
57	Entwistle, T; Martin, S	2005	From Competition to Collaboration in Public Service Delivery: A New Agenda For Research	PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION		149

<b>Nr.</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Pub Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Journal/ Book/ Organization</b>	<b>Citation WoS</b>	<b>Citation Google<sup>a</sup></b>
58	Flinders, M	2004	The Politics of Public-Private Partnerships	THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF POLITICS & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS		169
59	Ghobadian, A et al.	2004	Chapter: The Instrument of Transforming the Public Services	Book: Public Private Partnerships: Policy and Experience		
60	Greve, C; Hodge, G	2010	Chapter: Public-Private Partnerships and Public Governance Challenges	Book: The New Public Governance?		
61	Grimsey, D; Lewis, M	2002	Evaluating the Risks of Public Private Partnerships for Infrastructure Projects	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT		363
62	Grimsey, D; Lewis, M	2004	Chapter: The Nature of Partnerships	Book: Public-Private Partnerships: The Worldwide Revolution in Infrastructure Provision and Project Finance		
63	Grimsey, D; Lewis, M	2005	Are Public-Private Partnerships Value for Money? Evaluating Alternative Approaches and Comparing Academic and Practitioner Views	ACCOUNTING FORUM		207
64	Hodge, G; Greve, C	2005	Chapter: Introduction	Book: The Challenge of Public-Private Partnerships. Learning from Experience		
65	Klijn, E-H; Teisman, G	2000	Chapter: Governing Public-Private Partnerships: Analysing and Managing the Processes and Institutional Characteristics of Public-Private Partnerships	Book: Public-Private Partnerships: Theory and Practice in International Perspective		
66	Klijn, E-H; Teisman, G	2005	Chapter: Public-Private Partnerships as the Management of Co-production. Strategic and Institutional Obstacles in a Difficult Marriage	Book: The Challenge of Public-Private Partnerships. Learning from Experience		
67	Klijn, E-H	2010	Chapter: Public-private Partnerships: Deciphering Meaning, Message and Phenomenon	Book: International Handbook on Public-Private Partnerships		
68	Li, B; Akintoye, A.	2003	Chapter: An overview of Public-Private Partnership	Book: Public-Private Partnerships: Managing Risks and Opportunities		
69	Linder, S; Rosenau PV	2000	Chapter: Mapping the Terrain of the Public-Private Policy Partnership	Book: Public Private Policy Partnerships		
70	Lowndes, V; Skelcher C	1998	The Dynamics of Multi-Organizational Partnerships: An Analysis of Changing Modes of Governance	PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION		683
71	McQuaid, R	2000	Chapter: The theory of Partnership: Why have partnerships?	Book: Public-Private Partnerships: Theory and Practice in International Perspective		

Nr.	Authors	Pub Year	Title	Journal/ Book/ Organization	Citation WoS	Citation Google <sup>a</sup>
72	McQuaid, R	2010	Chapter: Theory of organizational partnerships: partnership advantages, disadvantages and success factors	Book: The New Public Governance?		
73	Mitchell-Weaver, C; Manning, B.	1991-1992	Public-Private Partnership in third world development	STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT		68
74	Osborne, S; Murray V	2000	Chapter: Understanding the process of public-private partnerships	Book: Public-Private Partnerships. Theory and Practice in International Perspective		
75	Savas, E	1999	Privatization and Public-Private Partnerships	Book		
76	Selsky JW; Parker B	2005	Cross-sector partnerships to address social issues: Challenges to theory and practice	JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT		358
77	Skelcher, C	2005	Chapter: Public-Private Partnerships and Hybridity	Book: Oxford Handbook of Public Management		
78	Skelcher, C	2010	Governing partnerships	Book: International Handbook on Public-Private Partnerships		
79	Spackmann, M	2002	Public-private partnerships: lessons from the British approach	ECONOMIC SYSTEMS		214
80	Teisman, GR; Klijn E-H	2002	Partnership Arrangements: Governmental Rhetoric or Governance Scheme?	PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW		233
81	Weihe G	2008	Ordering Disorder - on the Perplexities of the Partnership Literature	AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION		28
82	Weihe, G	2010	Chapter: Towards a process perspective on public-private partnerships	Book: International Handbook on Public-Private Partnerships		
83	Wettenhall, R	2003	The Rhetoric and Reality of Public-Private Partnerships	PUBLIC ORGANIZATION REVIEW		213
84	Wettenhall, R	2010	Chapter: Mixes and partnerships through time	Book: International Handbook on Public-Private Partnerships		
<b>DOCUMENTS FROM IOs, REGIONAL BANKS AND CONSULTANCIES</b>						
85	Temesgen, T	2011	Power Point Presentation: AfDB's activities in PPP Financing (prepared for conference Making Finance Work for Africa 2011)	African Development Bank		
86	African Development Bank	2014	Homepage: <a href="http://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/sectors/private-sector/areas-of-focus/public-private-partnerships/">http://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/sectors/private-sector/areas-of-focus/public-private-partnerships/</a>	African Development Bank		
87	Canadian Council for P3	2014	Homepage: <a href="http://www.pppcouncil.ca/">http://www.pppcouncil.ca/</a>	Canadian Council for P3		
88	Eggers, WD.; Startup, T.	2006	Online Publications: Closing the Infrastructure Gap: The Role of Public-Private Partnerships	Deloitte Consulting		

<b>Nr.</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Pub Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Journal/ Book/ Organization</b>	<b>Citation WoS</b>	<b>Citation Google<sup>a</sup></b>
89	Doverly, T et al.	2010	Research Study	Deloitte Consulting		
90	Deloitte	2014	Homepage: <a href="http://www.deloitte.com/view/en_xa/xa/services/public-private-partnerships-for-infrastructure/index.htm">http://www.deloitte.com/view/en_xa/xa/services/public-private-partnerships-for-infrastructure/index.htm</a>	Deloitte Consulting		
91	European Investment Bank	2004	The EIB's role in Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)	European Investment Bank		
92	Hall, D	2004	PPPs: A Critique of the Green Paper	European Federation of Public Service Union		
93	EU-Commission	2003	Online Publication: Guidelines for Successful Public-Private Partnerships	European Union		
94	EU-Commission	2004	Online Publication: Green Paper on Public-Private Partnerships and Community Law on Public Contracts and Concessions	European Union		
95	Hammami, M. et al.	1999	IMF Working Paper: Determinants of Public-Private Partnerships in Infrastructure	International Monetary Fund		
96	Fiscal Affairs Department (IMF)	2004	Online Publication: Public-Private Partnerships	International Monetary Fund		
97	KPMG Global	2014	Homepage: <a href="http://www.kpmg.com/global/en/industry/government-public-sector/pages/public-private-partnerships.aspx">http://www.kpmg.com/global/en/industry/government-public-sector/pages/public-private-partnerships.aspx</a>	KPMG Consulting		
98	McKinsey	2009	Online Publication: Creating Change at Scale through Public-Private Partnerships	McKinsey Consulting		
99	McKinsey	2009	Online Publication: Public-Private Partnerships: Harnessing the Private Sector's Unique Ability to Enhance Social Impact	McKinsey Consulting		
100	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development	2008	Online Publication: Public Private Partnerships - In Pursuit of Risk Sharing and Value for Money	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development		
101	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development	2011	Hand Out: From Lessons to Principles for the use of Public-Private Partnerships (Annual Meeting of Working Party of Senior Budget Officials)	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development		
102	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development	2013	Online Publication: Public Private Partnerships in Governance at a Glance 2013	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development		

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103	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development	2013	Online Publication: Better Regulation of Public-Private Partnerships for Transport Infrastructure	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development		
104	PriceWaterhouseCoopers	2005	Online Publication: Delivering the PPP Promise - A review of PPP issues and activity	PriceWaterhouseCoopers		
105	Farlam, P	2005	Nepad Policy Focus Series: Working Together – Assessing Public-Private Partnerships in Africa	South African Institute of International Affairs		
106	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe	2000	Online Publication: Guidelines on Private Public Partnerships for Infrastructure Development	United Nations		
107	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe	2008	Online Publication: Guidebook on Promoting Good Governance in Public-Private Partnerships	United Nations		
108	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and The Pacific	2011	Online Publication: A Guidebook on Public-Private Partnership in Infrastructure	United Nations		
109	Nikolic, I; Maikisch, H.	2006	HNP Discussion Paper: Public-Private Partnerships and Collaboration in the Health Sector	World Bank		
110	World Bank	2009	Online Publication: Attracting Investors to African Public-Private Partnerships	World Bank		
111	Delmon, J	2010	Online Publication: Understanding Options for Public-Private Partnerships in Infrastructure	World Bank		
112	World Bank	2014	Homepage: <a href="http://ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/overview">http://ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/overview</a>	World Bank		
113	Director-General	1999	Online Publication: Public-private partnerships for health	World Health Organization		



No clear definition of Public-Private Partnership (more specific meaning either absent or between the lines)

- a** Numbers for citations of book chapters and publications by global actors are not included as there is no solid counting of the latter
- b** The list from Web of Science was retrieved on 3/11/2014



## **Article 2: Embedding trust in time and space: Taking process seriously in inter-organizational trust research**

To be submitted

### **Abstract**

Although important advances towards more complex understandings of trust processes have been made, a search for universal ‘the higher, the lower’ relationships prevails. This article addresses such tendencies and proposes a shift towards a more processual understanding of inter-organizational trust. Following a processual orientation, the article re-embeds trust in time and space and emphasizes that it is inevitably an ongoing, concrete and situated experience. Moreover, it is from within the experienced process that embeddedness is (re)created and thus it is the truster who (re)shapes the perception of the other’s trustworthiness in the light of the past and the future.

Furthermore, by drawing attention to the inherent contingency of our world a processual orientation reinforces that it is the experience of future contingency rather than the perception of assuring and thereby predicting structures that shapes trust. Still, while distinct ways of dealing with contingency, the experience of assuring structures are inevitably part of the trust-embedding environment. Moreover, a processual study of trust between organizations cannot but follow multiple organizational members’ experiences as they participate in the relationship. Thus, overall, a processual approach integrates and advances current calls for more dynamic, integrative, multi-level and contextual approaches.

### **Keywords:**

Trust, Inter-organizational relations, Process



## **The need for a processual understanding of trusting**

Trust has emerged from being seen as an unintended ‘by-product’ (Long & Sitkin, 2006) to play a central role in business relationships and inter-organizational relationships (IORs). On the one hand this intensified focus on trust reflects economical inspired views that trust can function as an efficient substitute when safeguards are difficult and expensive to develop (Bromiley & Harris, 2006; Dyer & Chu, 2003). On the other hand, sociological theories usually highlight the growing complexity of our world and decreasing ability to predict the future, which in turn increases the need for trust (Luhmann, 2000; Zucker, 1986). Following the increased interest a significant number of scientific books and special issues have explored the nature, impact and development of trust in business relationships.<sup>1</sup>

The interdisciplinary interest has produced a wide variation of insights (for a recent overview see Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012), yet, there is a general tendency to focus ‘descriptively on “how much” (or even just “how many”) people trust – and hardly on “how” people work on trust continuously’ (Möllering, 2013: 285). Furthermore, trust research has been (and to a huge degree still is) no different from general social sciences: a search for causality, necessity and truth (Hernes, 2014) trying to identify and predict how certain antecedents can lead to trust or distrust and how trust can have an impact on outcomes, satisfaction and identity creation. Thus, following Khodyakov (2007) trust is usually treated as an independent and/or dependent variable. Somehow paradoxically, such a causality view is also maintained in the increasing number of studies that advocate trust as dynamic and co-evolving with its context (Inkpen & Currell, 2004; see e.g. Vlaar, Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2007; Woolthuis, Hillebrand, & Nooteboom, 2005) searching for ‘the higher, the lower’ relationships. Thereby, they fall short to acknowledge the contingency inherent in our increasingly complex and ever-progressing world.

By following a processual approach, the article offers a reinterpretation of trust and illustrates how an understanding of *trusting in time and space* can incorporate and acknowledge complexity rather than searching for inevitably simplifying models. Hence, the article follows up on previous advances to think more processually in the field of trust research (Khodyakov, 2007; Möllering, 2013) and proposes an analytical framework for future empirical studies on trusting in IORs. By discussing current tendencies in the literature, the article specifies how a processual understanding of inter-organizational trusting can answer and go beyond recent calls for more dynamic, multi-level, integrative and contextual studies of trust (R. Bachmann & Inkpen, 2011; Li, 2011; Mishra & Mishra, 2013; Nielsen, 2011). The discussion draws both on process theorists from the field of organizational studies (Chia & Holt, 2006; Helin, Hernes,

Hjorth, & Holt, 2014; Hernes, 2008; Hernes, 2014) and a number of trust scholars who, implicitly or explicitly, have emphasized differing processual aspects earlier (Dibben, 2000; Giddens, 1990; Khodyakov, 2007; Möllering, 2013; Wright & Ehnert, 2010).

The remainder of the article starts out with defining trust and relating it to an inter-organizational setting. This is followed by a processual reinterpretation towards trusting in time and space. The article then addresses five current tendencies in the current literature on (inter-organizational) trust through a processual lens and illustrates how the latter can address and overcome current challenges. The consequent discussion summons the main vantages of observing inter-organizational trust in a strong process view and presents an analytical framework. Finally, the article concludes with a summarizing processual definition of inter-organizational trust(ing) and encourages for future research to take process serious by exploring ongoing, concrete and situated experiences rather than higher/lower relationships.

### **What is trust?**

Although it is widely acknowledged that trust is an elusive concept, most authors seem to agree on some basic features of trust being mainly inspired by Mayer and colleagues (1995) and Rousseau and colleagues (1998). Following, trust can be defined as a truster's state of *favourable (positive) expectations* about a trustee despite the existence of alternatives and the *possibility to be disappointed*. Trust hence includes the acceptance of *vulnerability* in order to live as if the future was certain. Such a definition does not negate that trust is socially learnt and dispositional, yet it maintains that trust is not predestined by the latter but primarily based on the experience of the other. Hence, trust is based on a perception of *trustworthiness*. However, most scholars also point out that such knowledge of the other must remain incomplete as otherwise the other becomes predictable and trust superfluous (Lewis & Weigert, 1985).

In an inter-organizational setting it has been discussed whether or not the truster may be an organization or whether it remains the organizational members that trust (Kroeger, 2011; Möllering, 2006). Most scholars seem to agree that inter-organizational trust is a shift in locus rather than the nature of trust (Dibben, 2000). Hence, it remains *the individual that trusts* but the latter is embedded in an inter-organizational setting. Furthermore, an increasing number of scholars has also drawn attention to the wider *context* and highlighted that inter-organizational trust should not be separated from its institutional environment (R. Bachmann, 2010; Mishra & Mishra, 2013). Finally, it is also widely agreed that trust is not static but a *dynamic process*

where trust can take differing characteristics as the IOR develops (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Dibben, 2000; Nielsen, 2011).

Following the above-introduced definition of (inter-organizational) trust, there seems to be agreement about observing trusting relationships as embedded in contexts and emerging in dynamic processes. Why then write an article on trusting in time and space? Briefly, the difference between mainstream trust research and a processual approach as proposed in this paper is symbolized in the little word ‘in’ instead of ‘across’ time and space. In other words, it is argued that inter-organizational trust does not just change across linear, sequential periods of time and neither is it simply differing across contexts but it is from within time and space that embeddedness is (re)created. In the following, I will specify a processual understanding of trust in IORs before illustrating the latter by discussing current tendencies in the literature.

### **(Inter-organizational) trusting in time and space**

In this section I will argue that the word is inherently processual, fleeting and contingent thereby creating the need for trust and highlighting that trust can never be stable nor can it be separated from its embedding environment. Calls for more process-oriented research have been reinforced by a number of scholars in organizational studies, and while these share some fundamental ontological beliefs, they are far from a homogenous theory. Rather a processual orientation can be observed in various theoretical strands ranging from process philosophy, phenomenology, pragmatism, post-structuralism and not least ethnomethodology (Carlsen, 2006). The following reinterpretation of trust as trusting in time and space highlights central processual assumptions but by no means argues to be the only possible approach towards a more processual understanding. Furthermore while being the first to develop an overarching processual framework for the study of inter-organizational trust, the developed approach is no reinvention but, as outlined earlier, draws on a handful of trust scholars who have previously emphasized differing processual aspects as well as process theorists from the field of organizational studies.

The following five subsections introduce the main implications of a strong processual orientation towards trust. First, it is argued that it is human awareness for (the absence of) time and space that makes the world inherently contingent and lets us experience uncertainty and risks. Second, it is illustrated that the fundamental role of trusting is to accept such experienced uncertainty by still enabling to actualize a certain future. Third, it is shown how trusting takes place in time, followed fourth by an illustration of the situativeness of trusting. The final section emphasizes the endogeneity, relatedness and ongoingness of such trusting processes in IORs.

### *Contingency and uncertainty*

Let us start with exploring the conditions for trust. While many have argued that trust is necessarily based on a lack of knowledge and a perception of uncertainty, only few have addressed why uncertainty is such an inherent feature in social life in general and IORs in particular. From a processual perspective, contingency is inherently related to our being in time and space (Helin et al., 2014). We are bound to being in the present place while knowing that there are ever-absent futures and pasts and a myriad of absent spaces in which we are not or of which we have no knowledge. It follows that it is impossible to predict what will happen tomorrow or how our business partner will behave and perform. Yet, to state that our world is inherently contingent and open is foremost an ontological stance as we have found a number of ways that hide contingency and let the future and the social appear more predictable (Hernes, 2014).

In an inter-organizational setting there may be detailed contracts, rules of conduct, business routines, legal systems and many other ways that pull the future into the present by expecting the past to at least partly continue into the future. Still, and as outlined by Zucker (1986), Luhmann (2001) and not least Giddens (1990) such structures are themselves in need for continuous (re)production and trust. Thus, not all contingency can be successfully hidden and especially in modern times we increasingly question taken-for-grantedness and can impossibly understand all the specialized processes in societies. In other words we experience the absence of time and space as a source for future contingency. Thereby the future is not only filled with potentials but also experienced as uncertain and risky. Thus, besides plans, routines and rules, IORs need other ways of dealing with inevitably remaining uncertainty (James, 2014).

### *When uncertainty is suspended*

It is here that trust becomes fundamental as it enables positive expectations to form about a business partner despite and because of an experience of an absence in time and in space, i.e. contingency (Giddens, 1990: 33). Thus, trusting allows us to move forward and actualize a certain future while *leaving contingency in place* rather than hiding it. Thereby, trusting creates continuity when nothing can be for sure. In this vein, Möllering (2001, 2006) has made the ‘suspension of doubts’ or the ‘leap of faith’ one of his main concerns for the conceptualization and study of trust. Thereby trusting differs from placing a bet, as even if trust may be risky, it is not just decision-making under risk but to live as if the future was certain (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Still such a definition does not exclude calculations from preceding trust as long as the

positive expectations about the other are based on a suspension of doubts rather than on a choice of the least risky solution. At the end, a processual approach emphasizes concrete and inherently related experiences rather than actor intentions or motives as central to any observation (Chia & Holt, 2006).

### *Trusting in time*

While trusting thus enables to deal with an absence of the future and the past, it still takes place in the present and, as such, it is a continuous experience. It is from within the present that we form expectations about a trustee's future while drawing on memories from the past. It follows that the past, present and future are inherent to any action although one might well predominate (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998: 972). With regards to trust it can be argued that it is necessarily future-oriented while it may be drawing in various degrees of past experiences (Wright & Ehnert, 2010: 118). Yet, it is important to note that trust 'overdraws the information that it possesses from the past and risk[s] an actualization of the future' (Luhmann, 2000: 23, own translation). In other words, trust is inevitably based on but not determined by the present experience of the past that frames and enables our interpretation of the other in the future.

### *Trusting in space*

Turning to space, the past, present and future are not just empty floating dimensions. Rather, experience takes place in specific places and the future is imagined as spaces where actions can take place. Thus, when we draw on past experience, we relate it to given situations and environments and may expect them to either alter or continue into the future. It is inevitably in space that we make sense of past and future spaces, their limits and possibilities. Thus, we imagine our business partner to perform in a given environment and setting and, as such, we interpret his/her trustworthiness in space (Wright & Ehnert, 2010: 109). Thus, as with temporality, it is from within the ongoing process that the context is (re)created. Let me specify this argument in the final subsection.

### *Trusting: A continuous, relating and endogenous process*

Following a processual orientation, the focus should be on experiences rather than motives, interests or collective determinants as if they could perform influence from some outside. Only by following processes as endogenous can we observe how temporality and space is (re)created allowing for trusting to grow or fail processes (Carlsen, 2006; Hernes, 2014). Thereby a processual view emphasizes relatedness as constitutive for social life and does not just refer to

the relation between the truster and the trustee. Rather any experiences are inherently referring and relating to a world that is already there (or has already been there) and thus a world that is intersubjectively recognized (Weick, 2001: 12). Thereby a processual orientation ‘represents a complete shift in emphasis away from the core premises of methodological individualism’ (Chia & Holt, 2006: 638). It follows that it makes no sense to talk of trust as a dependent or independent variable, as in IORs trusting experiences are just as much continuously made by IOR-processes as part of the ongoing process to (re)create IORs.

Finally, the inescapability of time as ongoing presents also emphasizes that there are no sequential and linear processes as any trusting present is inevitably unique and passing, creating the need for new actualizations of trusting presents. Thus, also seemingly stable periods of trust between organizations are in need of continuous work and (re)actualizations. Epistemologically, a processual understanding of trusting then seeks to understand how changing and/or continuing interpretations of situational and past experiences in inter-organizational settings inform people’s orientation towards the future enabling them to jump despite the possibility of a hard landing and broken bones. This does not necessarily imply longitudinal studies but emphasizes to be sensitive towards the continuous temporal and spatial work that is needed to create seemingly stable but also changing experiences of trust.

### **Addressing five tendencies in the trust literature**

This section will adapt above-introduced processual understanding to discuss and explore five tendencies in the trust literature concerning (1) trustworthiness, (2) the relationship between trust and control, (3) trust and context, (4) trust as multi-level phenomenon and finally (5) trust as process. By addressing these tendencies, the section refines and illustrates the processual conceptualization of trusting. Table 1 below summarizes the differences between a non-processual and a processual approach regarding the five identified tendencies.

**Table 1: Comparing a non-processual and processual understanding of inter-organizational trust(ing)**

	<b>Non-processual</b>	<b>Processual</b>
Trustworthiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measuring and calculating trustworthiness and trust as probability</li> <li>• Assumptions of simple input–output relationship and attempts to universalize the latter</li> <li>• Trusting cues as atemporal and acontextual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trustworthiness as experience of the other’s likelihood but not risk-reducing nor decision-making under risk</li> <li>• Trust is based on but not determined by trustworthiness</li> <li>• Trustworthiness inherently related to previous experiences and the specific setting in which it is interpreted</li> </ul>
Trust and control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Either/or relationships</li> <li>• Conflations of trust and control</li> <li>• Focus on inter-organizational control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust and assurance as distinct, yet inherently related concepts</li> <li>• Assurance beyond inter-organizational structures</li> </ul>
Trust and context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context as external influences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embeddedness (re)created from within the trusting process and referring to the spatial <i>and</i> temporal surrounding.</li> </ul>
Multi-level approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differing levels (individual, group, organizational, institutional) of trust influencing each other</li> <li>• Inter-organizational trust more than the managing director’s trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual experiences inherently relating to their wider and narrower environment (levels)</li> <li>• Focus on inter-organizational trusting naturally including multiple individual experiences</li> </ul>
Trust processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processes as periodic, subsequent sequences changing trust over time</li> <li>• Processes as atemporal and acontextual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processes as continuous (re)actualizations of trust</li> <li>• Processes cannot be separated from their environment, previous experiences and future expectations</li> </ul>

### *1. Trustworthiness (trusting cues)*

As outlined above, it is widely acknowledged that trust is relational in the sense that it does not develop independent of the potential trustee and it follows that trustworthiness has been

integrated as central to the concept of trust. This subsection addresses first of all the tendency of measuring trustworthiness as simplifying input–output relationships based on probabilities rather than a suspension of doubts. Second, the predominance of acontextual and atemporal explorations is discussed.

Given the positive effects that have been ascribed to trust, it is not surprising that a wide range of scholars has explored the bases for trust, specifically the sources for trustworthiness. Prominent examples are Mayer and colleagues (1995) who identified ability, benevolence and integrity as sources for trustworthiness, a framework that has been applied by a number of scholars (compare e.g. Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Dyer & Chu, 2003). Another widely tested framework is that of McAllister (1995) who identifies citizenship behaviour and interaction frequency as important antecedents for affect-based trust and reliably role performance, cultural–ethnic similarity and professional credentials as sources for cognition-based trust (p. 27). These two are by no means the only frameworks and McEvily and Tortoriello (2011) point towards a total of 38 bases (dimensions) that have been identified across publications.

The multiplicity of developed models highlights first of all the difficulty (or rather impossibility) to find universal applicable models. Yet, more problematic is the measuring and testing of such frameworks turning trustworthiness into mere probabilities *and* assuming simple input–output relationships. Concerning the calculation of probabilities, already Williamson (1993) argues that such a ‘practice of using “trust” and “risk” interchangeably should ... be discontinued’ (p. 486). While Williamson further concludes that trust should be reserved for personal rather than business relationships, there are a number of scholars who have argued against this conclusion. Just recently, a special issue in the *Journal of Trust Research* (2014, 4(1)) has revitalized the discussion about calculated trust.

As outlined earlier, a processual understanding does not engage in discussions on motives and intentions but the central questions is whether one experiences the positive expectations about the other as a bet and pure risk-taking or as a suspension of doubts about the remaining uncertainty and/or risks (compare also Möllering, 2006: 48). The critique is thus not so much whether or not a truster may involve calculative motives but rather the tendency of trustworthiness studies to reduce trust to nothing more than risk-taking. Moreover and as outlined by Möllering (2006), by assuming the input (trustworthiness) to be the output (trust), these studies make trust a superfluous concept.



Following this line of thought, Williamson has indeed a point that trust is conflated with risk-taking and pure calculation. However, and that is where a processual approach clearly deviates from (bounded) rational approaches, such a reduction of trust is foremost based on research practices and does not tell us anything about the ongoing experiences of business partners. Thus, trust is indeed distinct to risk-taking but it is the concrete relating experience in IORs that provides insights into the role of trust rather than a priori assumptions about purely calculative (bounded) actors.

A second challenge with such trustworthiness frameworks is their predominant acontextuality, ignoring the relation to the experienced situation as well as the exclusion of time and previous experiences. However, trustworthiness is not just some objective information that is perceived similarly by any potential trustor – rather it is the trustor that interprets signals and by relating them to the other, the past and the future in a given setting, he/she may or may not decide to jump. Following, cultural–ethnic similarity (McAllister, 1995) may be a cue for distrusting or suspicion when previous experiences are related to high corruption or even war. While such processes of forming expectations indeed often are implicit and intuitive, they are still inseparable from the past and the surrounding setting.

## *2. Trust and control*

The following paragraphs address the widely discussed relationship between trust and control. While there is a general understanding of an inseparable trust–control nexus, the nature of this relationship is ‘one of the most controversial’ (Bijlsma-Frankema & Costa, 2005: 260). A number of scholars have pointed to their substitutive connection (Dekker, 2004), whereas others have shown how control can foster trust and vice versa, thus promoting a complementary perspective (Long & Sitkin, 2006; Sitkin & George, 2005). Recent explorations seem increasingly to focus on their co-evolution where differing forms of control and trust can form substitutive *and* complementary relationships (Costa & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007; Edelenbos & Eshuis, 2012; Inkpen & Currell, 2004; Vlaar et al., 2007). While thereby acknowledging that the world is not simply either/or, there are still three inherent challenges from within a processual perspective. The first one is the search for generalizable ‘the higher, the lower’ relationships. A second one is the often exclusive focus on inter-organizational control mechanisms, while a third critique addresses highly questionable trust types that seem to conflate control and trust.

Beginning with the search for universal relationships, the studies are in so far compatible with a processual understanding as they observe trust and control as related, yet only few

scholars have explored that they are inherently so (Möllering, 2005; Sydow & Windeler, 2003). By drawing on Giddens, the interrelatedness argument points out that one cannot be disembedded from the surrounding structures that at least partly predict the future – yet ‘because of the contingent (re)production of social systems, control is always imperfect’ (Sydow & Windeler, 2003: 75). In other words, also control is embedded in trust that existing structures will be reproduced by actors. Acknowledging that the world cannot be without forces but is still inherently contingent and open is very much in line with a processual approach (Helin et al., 2014).

While thus mutual constitutive, the duality relationship between control and trust is not precluding mutual weakening and strengthening relationships from developing – yet, given the inherent contingency of the future and the need for continuous (re)production, generalizing ‘higher–lower’ relationships are inevitably simplifying. Also it is the experiencing individual that (re)creates control and trust and ascribes meaning to the latter. In this vein, monitoring practices may be experienced as another organization’s interest in one’s work or as distrust in one’s ability to perform or they may even be ignored. In other words, ‘it remains an open question as to whether organizational members will, in fact, follow ... rules (since people are not machines) and, in a sense, they have to be trusted so to do’ (Grey & Garsten, 2001: 234). A processual orientation does not only acknowledge that it is an empirical question, but the empirical is the point of departure for observing emerging patterns.

Turning to the second critique of focusing on inter-organizational control, we may again draw on Giddens who disregards the artificial separation of micro–macro processes when highlighting that it is inevitably on a micro level that structures are (re)produced (Giddens, 1979). In other words, inter-organizational trusting, as experienced by involved actors is just as much embedded in relation-specific controls as it is in inter-personal structures and wider environmental regulations that are being (re)produced in the everyday cooperation. While a number of scholars have indeed integrated wider institutional structures in the control concept (Sydow & Windeler, 2003; Woolthuis et al., 2005) I propose to replace the term ‘control’ with ‘assurance’ (a term borrowed from Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994), to emphasize the integration of all the perceived structures that reduce alternatives and turn the future more predictable.

Third, and finally, there are a number of trust-types in the literature that seem to base trust on the existence of such assuring mechanisms and are therefore highly questionable. Amongst these is contractual and deterrence-based trust where ‘the costly sanctions in place for breach of trust

exceeds any potential benefits from opportunistic behavior' (Rousseau et al., 1998: 398). While it has been outlined that any form of assurance must remain incomplete, the problem with such trust-types is their explanation of trust by referring to risk-minimizing cues (sanctions, fines etc.) and not with reference to the suspension of doubts about the residual uncertainty. In a similar vein, institution-based trust has also been criticized given that it refers to 'trusting another party because of clear, pre-established expectations, generally with negative consequences when trust is violated' (Hagen & Choe, 1998: 590).

A processual understanding highlights that these contractual and institutional assuring mechanisms are inherently embedding trust, yet they are not explaining trust and neither should they be conflated to be a type of trust. Admittedly, the line between risk-reducing assurance and likelihood-increasing trusting cues can be thin but we may picture trustworthiness as being the springboard that can help bracketing the experienced uncertainty (Luhmann, 2000) and assuring mechanism as defining the height of the hindrance that one needs to jump above. The more the future behaviour of the other is assured by controls and institutional norms, the lower the hindrance will be and the lower one has to jump. Still, it is the jump and related suspension of doubts that creates trust.

### *3. Trust and context*

The importance of context is increasingly highlighted by scholars interested in inter-organizational trust research (R. Bachmann, 2010; Ferrin & Gillespie, 2010; Mishra & Mishra, 2013). The focus on context partly overlaps with the above-mentioned focus on institution-based trust and thus the wider institutional structures that influence trust in IORs. The potential conflation of trust with embedding assurance mechanisms has been addressed above and will therefore not be repeated here. Rather, firstly the focus will be on tendencies to assume unidirectional contextualizing practices and secondly this subsection emphasizes that embeddedness means more than the institutional environment.

When Lane and Bachmann (1996) for example explore differing environmental settings to influence the existence and type of trust in buyer–supplier relationships in Germany and Britain it becomes difficult to ascertain whether the existent environmental factors are actually perceived by the IORs or whether the authors identify them independently. This is not to doubt that the identified social orders can be experienced as influencing buyer–supplier relationships but, as put by Wright and Ehnert, to emphasize that 'the best guidance ... is to be led by the research subjects and hear from them what they feel have been the key contextualising factors

that have influenced them' (Wright & Ehnert, 2010: 117). Given that the *context* thus only matters as actual *text* it can be argued that the term 'context' is ill-fated in a strong processual view as 'there is no spatial context beyond the process' (Hernes, 2014: 57). Therefore, the term 'embeddedness' is preferred to 'context'.

Second, the focus on embeddedness does not only refer to the wider institutional environment but rather the experienced situation that is inherently related to these wider structures and not least the experienced past and projected future. While experiences indeed often are intuitive rather than reflected, they are still inevitably embedded and framed by their environment and history. Hence, embeddedness refers to more than assuring structures but encompasses the experience of time and space in a broader sense.

#### *4. Multi-level approaches*

Partly overlapping with requests for more contextual studies, an increasing number of scholars have called for more multi-level approaches to explore the interplay between individuals, teams, organizations and institutions (R. Bachmann & Inkpen, 2011; Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012; Kroeger, 2011; Schilke & Cook, 2013). This subsection, while encouraging to follow processes as they evolve across 'levels', highlights that the latter should happen from within and as natural observation rather than by following pre-defined and artificially separated levels. Thus, organizations are more than their senior managers but neither can they be separated from the latter.

Whereas the interplay between institutions and organizations is encompassed by calls for more contextual studies, the emphasis on multi-level research goes beyond 'context' when opening organizations or teams to be more than single members or their top managers (Swärd, 2013). Such multi-level approaches maintain that one should not speak of inter-organizational trust if the source for the study is a single referent from the relationship (Inkpen & Currell, 2004). Thereby calls for multi-level approaches are in line with a more processual orientation in so far as they oppose simplifying assumptions equalling managers with their organizations.

Yet, just as it is simplifying to make managers representatives for their whole organizations, as much is it artificial to separate them from their organizations. Rather, and as outlined above, employees and managers are inherently intertwined with their organizations and, by actively participating in organizational processes, they also (re)create the organization and not least its relationships with other organizations (and their members). Hence, a processual orientation welcomes the opening of black-boxed organizations and IORs, it also emphasizes that differing

organizational members and levels are inherently embedded in their (inter)-organizational relationships.

### 5. *The trust process*

It has been indicated that most scholars who go beyond pure psychological studies of trust embrace the concept as dynamic and changeable (Nooteboom & Six, 2003; Swärd, 2013). This subsection argues, however, that existing process models tend to be ‘periodic’ and thereby simplify the dynamic character of trusting relationships (Schultz & Hernes, 2013). Second, it is discussed that – similar to the elaboration on trustworthiness – most of these models are both acontextual and atemporal. Yet, as pointed out above when taking process seriously, trusting relationships do not just change sequentially *across* time and situations, but are in need for continuous (re)actualizations *in* time and space.

Beginning with the tendency for ‘periodic’ process models, the most prominent process model is probably from Lewicki and Bunker (1996). They propose that IORs run through three stages, beginning with calculus-based trust maturing into knowledge-based trust and, in some few instances, reach identification-based trust. Hence, the proposed stages are successive and changing in a step-wise manner where trust ‘takes on a different character in the early, developing and mature stages’ (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996: 118). Recently, Nielsen (2011) has argued for a more dynamic understanding of such processes, formulating that ‘trust should not be viewed as static causal variable for the duration or success of the alliance is likely to evolve simultaneously with the alliance relationship giving rise to co-evolutionary dynamics’ (p. 161). Still, despite of the existence of feedback loops, also he refers to pre-defined and sequential phases (formation, implementation and evolution) in which trust has stable functions (antecedents, moderator, outcome). While trust may have all these differing functions and bases when IORs evolve, the critique from a strong processual perspective is the underlying assumption of periodic stability with regards to the differing functions thereby ignoring the continuous need for (re)creation as time cannot be frozen (Hernes, 2014).

Turning to the second trend, most process models disembedd developments from temporal and spatial experiences. Hence, they ‘describe [the dynamic character of trust] in an oversimplistic way’ (Wright & Ehnert, 2010: 109). In this vein, some process models assume trusting to start at a zero baseline when IORs are formed (Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006). Yet, even if the potential partners have not been working together before, their eventual first impression is interpreted in the light of a past and the embedding situation (Dibben, 2000).

Put differently, there is always a history and an already experienced environment upon which any new relationship builds and from which it cannot be separated. Thus, if we want to gain a richer understanding of the formation processes of IORs we should not assume a ‘day 1’ nor should we assume that trust starts from zero and free of its surrounding environment.

Thus, while a processual approach embraces the call for dynamic and process studies it is generally cautious of moving too far into universalistic and hierarchical models of trust-building. Also it emphasizes that any start and change is based on continuity, while seemingly stable processes are always also based on change given the continuous need for (re)actualizations when no present can be lived in its original twice.

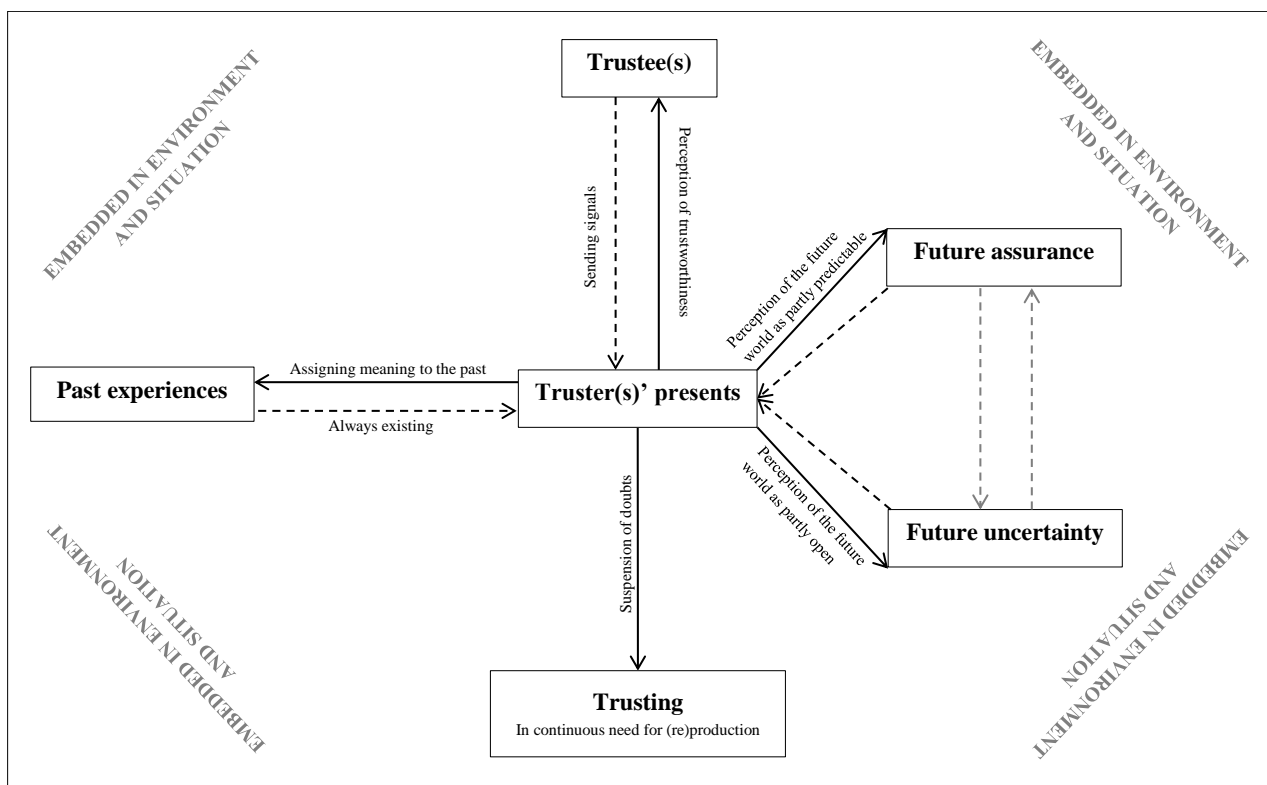
### **A framework for studying trusting in time and space**

In the following, I will summarize and specify how a processual study of trusting enhances yet also challenges recent calls for more dynamic, integrated, contextual and multi-level approaches. Subsequently, an analytical framework (see Figure 1 below) is presented to inspire future processual research. While a two-dimensional and fixed illustration must inevitably remain simplifying the processual, the framework highlights some main aspects that are inherent to a processual understanding of trusting in general and inter-organizational trusting in particular. Finally, the discussion outlines some research challenges that follow a more processual orientation.

Let me begin with specifying the strengths of a strong processual approach. First, rather than trying to capture the complexity of trusting relationship by applying inevitably simplifying pre-defined models, a processual approach embraces the complexity by focusing on the concreteness and endogeneity of the world as experienced. Hence, it refrains from forcing ‘an artificial stilleben model upon the world’ (Helin et al., 2014) and emphasizes to let the processes themselves unfold their dynamic and continuous (re)productions. While causality may be experienced as real, it is as such (i.e. a causal experience) that it should be observed. Furthermore, a processual approach inherently focuses on the temporal and spatial embeddedness of trusting processes and is thereby naturally integrative towards the embedding assuring mechanisms and environments (context) as well as previous experiences and future projections in the ongoing presents. Finally, by following concrete experiences a processual orientation towards inter-organizational trust is inherently multi-level when following trusting processes as they evolve across hierarchies and between organizations.

Despite the risk of falling short to account for the complexity of a processual approach towards trusting, Figure 1 below illustrates a framework for studying the latter. Being a snapshot, the ongoingness of trusting processes needs to be imagined beyond the illustration. In an inter-organizational setting, the framework is of course multiplying and therefore the plural is used. Given the mutual relationship, these roles of the truster and trustee are of course interchanged when differing organizational members are in focus. While not specifically addressed in this article, the trustee may indeed be a whole team, organization or wider institutional structure experienced as uncertain in the IOR – yet it is the process and experience that decides. The continuous lines highlight the importance to focus on the trusters’ experiences while the dashed arrows emphasize that these are inherently related to the experienced. Furthermore, the lighter dashed arrows between future assurance and future uncertainty emphasize the dual and co-evolving relationship between the two. Finally, the embeddedness in a specific environment and situation is illustrated as encompassing all the identified aspects of a processual approach – yet it should be reemphasized that these have no influence of their own but only exist as experienced and (re)produced by the truster.

**Figure 1: Analytical framework towards processual studies of (inter-organizational) trusting**



Before turning to some concluding remarks and proposals for future research, I will point towards two vital challenges of process research. First, while guided by the concreteness of experiences, it becomes inevitably complex when multiple organizational members are involved and trusting is by far the only way of dealing with future uncertainty in IORs. Thus, while advising to keep an open mind when studying experiences, there is no ‘one’ right way of doing process research that covers the full complexity of experiences. Rather, as also nicely presented by Möllering (2013), there may be many issues that can be of interest in a processual perspective and while some may focus mainly on the experience of environmental and interpersonal experiences, others may want to focus on the learning aspects and how changing and continuing trusting relationships are based on continuous (re)modellings of the past and the future.

Second, the focus on experiences and their interpretations does indeed challenge the researcher’s reflexivity and makes the latter inevitably part of the process. Although a processual approach towards the world neglects the existence of neutral observers in the first place it does not provide a blueprint for random research. Rather, the following of experiences also needs to invite the future reader into the process by being transparent and comprehensible.

## **Conclusions**

A processual view answers current calls for dynamic, integrative, contextual and multi-level approaches by going beyond micro–macro or internal–external distinctions and putting process at the centre of inter-organizational research. Thus, it is from within the concrete, ongoing and individual experiences that the inherent relatedness towards the embedding time and space can be observed in an inter-organizational setting. In the following I will conclude with a processual conceptualization of inter-organizational trust.

In a processual perspective inter-organizational trusting is experienced by its multiple members that both are embedded in the inter-organizational setting while simultaneously (re)creating the latter. Inter-organizational trusting can further be reconceptualized as present positive expectations about a partner’s future performance that are based on, but not determined by, past experiences as interpreted in present situations. Essential for the experience of trusting is the perception of future contingency, yet the latter is inevitably framed by assuring mechanisms that enable and limit the awareness for future possibilities. Furthermore, trusting implies the suspension of doubts related to the experience of alternatives and thereby creates vulnerability and the chance of being disappointed. Lastly, trusting is an ongoing process that is



in need of continuous (re)production creating novel presents as we move with time and, as such, is inevitably open for change.

### **Limitations and future alleys**

Finally, let me shortly outline two important issues that have not been addressed in the confined space of this paper and finish with a general call for more empirical research. First, little efforts have been used on exploring the trustee in this paper and the latter may indeed be an organization, structure or norm that is experienced to have alternatives. Interviewing a truster may show that he/she has several objects of trust in an inter-organizational setting ranging from the other manager to his/her affiliation to an organization or a group and the nationality or culture that he/she embodies to the truster. Process research is exactly what enables such explorative studies and the multidimensionality of trusting should be addressed further.

Second, the processual orientation is, as outlined earlier, not one streamlined theory or perspective. While experience has been put centre-stage in this article, more attention could indeed be paid to the intuitive of such experience and the Being-in-the world as Heidegger has put it (Chia & Holt, 2006; Frederiksen, 2014). Here, the relationship between trust, confidence and familiarity is a central theme and, while it has been discussed and approached before (Dibben, 2000; Endress, 2012; Luhmann, 2000), especially the relationship between confidence and trust remains unclear in the literature and I believe that it can be beneficially addressed by focusing on their dealing with and awareness of future contingency.

Finally and more important, than to abstractly discuss the many dimensions and closely related concepts of trusting, is the focus on exploring ongoing experiences rather than developing abstract theoretical models. Hence, a processual orientation calls for more explorative studies as to enrich and deepen our understanding for how organizational members deal with the constant streams of signals about the other, the past, the future and the embedding environment as to form positive expectations despite the perception of contingency. By going back to the experienced, we will exactly get the dynamic and integrative studies that are being asked for.

### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> see for example Academy of Management 1998 23(3), Organization Studies 2001 22(2), International Sociology 2005 20(3), Group & Organization Management 2007 32(4), as well as Bachmann and Zaheer (2006, 2013), Kramer (2006), Nooteboom and Six (2003)

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**Article 3: Trusting as the vitamin D in strong relational public-private partnerships: Essential for survival but difficult to obtain and maintain in cloudy times**

Revise and resubmit in:

*Administration & Society*

**Abstract**

This article explores the need and role of trusting in Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) that exhibit strong relational contracts. It finds that trust is constitutive in order to overcome the inherent contingencies, forcing partners to continuously form positive expectations despite the possibility of alternatives. An empirical analysis of two Danish cases illustrates how the need for trusting multiplies when it is required on several organizational levels. Also, it shows how trusting co-evolves with assuring mechanisms (e.g. contract, procurement rules). Finally, the analysis identifies challenges that appear when the space for trust also creates the possibility for distrust, potentially dissolving the PPP.

**Keywords:** Trust, assurance, public-private partnerships, control, case study, process

## Introduction

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have become an established means of delivering goods and services around the world. Decision-making in PPPs is often complex, and active management of the daily relationship is necessary in order to reach mutual objectives. Trust has been identified as significant for the formation, functioning, and success of PPPs, yet research on this topic is still scarce (Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke, 2007; Edelenbos & Klijn, 2007; Edelenbos & Eshuis, 2012). Generally, little is known about the processes of PPPs (Noble & Jones, 2006; Weihe, 2010).

Instead, public administration and governance scholars have focused on (a) the evaluation of PPP outcomes (economic, political and social) and (b) the legitimacy of PPPs given their typical lifespan, which places crucial long-term challenges to future generations outside the legislative period of political decision-makers (Hodge, Greve, & Boardman, 2010). Those that have paid attention to the relationship dimension of PPPs have mainly focused on regulatory governance schemes and structures of PPPs, as well as their association to outcomes and the political system (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Skelcher, 2010).

The lack of research on trusting processes in PPPs is surprising in three respects. First, the term “partnership” implies that there is an active relational dimension in such arrangements; it is this very dimension that many politicians, researchers, and practitioners have promoted as being distinct from traditional outsourcing and privatization (Wettenhall, 2010). Second, there is a vast body of literature on inter-organizational relations (IORs) and business alliances that points to the importance of trust for success and satisfaction with their outcomes (Child, Faulkner, & Tallman, 2005; Krishnan, Martin, & Noorderhaven, 2006; Poppo & Zenger, 2002; Vlaar, Van den Bosch, & Volberda, 2007). Distrust, on the other hand, has been associated with less information sharing, rejection of influence, and the evasion of control, thus having a negative effect on inter-organizational performance (Vlaar et al., 2007). Third, as pointed out above, the small number of scholars that have addressed the subject of trust in PPPs since the late 2000s support these general insights from the field of IOR and point to the positive relationship of trust, facilitation, solidification, and outcomes in PPPs (Edelenbos & Klijn, 2007; E. Klijn, Edelenbos, & Steijn, 2010).

However, existing research does not address questions about (1) why trust plays such a fundamental role in PPPs, and (2) how trusting evolves and is handled in time and space. This article addresses these questions by drawing on insights from contracting and trust literature in the fields of law, sociology, economics, and IORs. Furthermore, an in-depth study of two PPPs

within the health sector in Denmark provides insights into the ongoing processes of trusting experiences and management of the PPP relationship.

The conclusion of the article finds first that trust is constitutive in PPPs with strong relational contracts as to deal with the inherent contingency of a not-yet-defined future. Second, it shows how the need for trust multiplies, given that the PPP continues in time and several organizational levels are included. Third, the empirical analysis of partnership practices illustrates how trusting and assuring (e.g. through a contract, procurement processes, or monitoring) can co-evolve in mutually constitutive, reinforcing, and weakening relationships. Fourth, it is demonstrated that the space for trust inherently provides the space for distrust and the case study identifies four challenges that foster the evolvment of the skepticism. Following, in both cases, the evolution of skepticism eroded the partnerships, where in one case the organization fell back on the assuring behavior patterns of traditional outsourcing contracts the other maintained the appearance of a partnership even as it disappeared in everyday practice. Hence, trusting can be compared to the Vitamin D of PPPs: essential for survival but difficult to obtain and maintain when clouds obscure its sources.

This article begins by introducing and defining two main concepts: the strong relational PPP and trusting in time and space. The third section introduces the cases and methodology. A fourth section analyzes the first research question, exploring how strong relational PPPs depend on trust and correspondently require increasing and continuous reproductions and new productions of trust. The fifth section addresses the second research question, focusing on how managers deal with the multiplying need for trust within a PPP arrangement. Finally, the conclusion formulates the main arguments and findings, combining them with some practical implications.

### **Strong relational public-private partnerships**

Scholars interested in PPPs know that the label is far from unambiguous; as Bovaird comments, “PPP usually mean heterogeneity, not tidiness” (2004, p. 103). Apart from the many differing aims and structures of PPP arrangements, one central difference seems to split the literature on PPPs. One strand focuses on PPPs as long-term projects of financial risk-shifting and responsibility changes; the other focuses on the PPP as an ongoing relationship between partners, based on trust, loyalty, and reciprocity (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998). While these two views are not mutually exclusive, there has been some criticism of PPP arrangements that mainly focus on responsibility and risk allocation over a long period of time rather than an actual interactive relationship. The most prominent example of this arrangement is the Private



Finance Initiative (PFI) that was launched by the conservative government in the UK in 1992. Interestingly, such PFI/PPPs tend to dominate the public discourse, although, as Wettenhall (2010) remarks, “much serious analysis shows that many of them do not function like partnerships at all” (p. 25).

The dominance of PFI/PPPs may explain why relatively little attention has been paid to relational aspects such as trust and managerial processes, as opposed to ownership structures, risk distribution, and outcomes (Weihe, 2010). Although it can be argued that even the most specific (discrete) contracts are to some extent relational when contracting is practiced (Reeves, 2008), this article focuses on PPPs that deliberately aim for an ongoing relationship and collective decision-making. To distinguish these from other forms of PPPs, I will use the term “strong relational PPPs” in this paper. These are defined as arrangements between at least one public and one private sector organization based on a mutual commitment to collaborate around a joint objective. Such partnerships do not need to go beyond the contract when being relational, but the relational becomes an integral part of the agreement.

This definition is close to what others have called a genuine or true partnership (Bloomfield, 2006; Wettenhall, 2010). It also parallels Bovaird’s (2004) conceptualization of PPPs, yet differs by making the relational an integral part of the contract rather than “over and above the implied in any contract” (p. 200). While a more thorough discussion of the relational will follow in the analysis, for now it is sufficient to note that the proposed definition does not claim that there cannot be a relational dimension in, say, PFI/PPPs in practice. Still, strong relational PPPs differ to the extent that their contractual foundation makes a future relationship constitutive rather than extra-contractual.

### **Trusting and its relation to assuring and distrusting**

Much like the discourse on PPPs, trust is also associated with some confusion and elusiveness in the literature, caused in part by the wide interest from various disciplines such as sociology, economics, psychology, management, ethics, and politics (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007; Welter, 2012). This article takes its point of origin in a sociological and managerial perspective, where the processual character of trusting—and the world in general—becomes central to the concept. From this perspective, the focus is on the continuous processes of trusting given the inescapable ongoingness of time that renders stable states of trust impossible and artificial. Trusting is defined as the willingness and ability to form present positive expectation about another’s behavior or action in the future despite the perception of alternative outcomes and the

possibility of being disappointed. Furthermore, trusting is based on—but not predestined by—present perceptions of trustworthiness and the specific setting, both being inseparable from the truster's experience of the past. Finally, it goes beyond predictability and calculation, as doubt is suspended actively in time and space. Let me explain some of the main implications of such a definition in the following section, and relate it to existing research publications on trust.

First, while the existence of differing propensities to trust is acknowledged, the focus here is on situational trusting, embedded both in the current situation and past experiences. Thus, situational trust is always learned from history (Dibben, 2000, p. 7). Moreover, trusting processes should not be seen as step-wise and successive (compare also Möllering, 2013; Wright & Ehnert, 2010), but rather as processes in which the present interpretation of the past is continuously altered, reproduced and projected into a positive future.

Second, trusting may be based on the other's trustworthiness in a given situation, but cannot be reduced to the latter (Colquitt et al., 2007). On the one hand, just because the other seems trustworthy, we may neither want nor need to trust. On the other hand, trust is more than “a logic of a black-boxed input-output relationship” (Möllering, 2013, p. 291); consequently, trustworthiness needs to be combined with a lack of information if we are to speak about trusting (e.g. Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Third, trusting reflects future contingency, or as Lewis and Weigert (1985) put it, “trust succeeds where rational prediction alone would fail, because to trust is to live as if certain rationally possible futures will not occur” (p. 969).

Given these three points, I conclude that trust assumes future contingency but is not free of stabilizing considerations such as the experience of trustworthiness which in the following is referred to as trusting cues. Yet, trusting overdraws such information or knowledge (Luhmann, 2000) and contingency remains in place. Thus, trust is not to be conflated with situations where the other is expected to perform in a predictable manner due to established rules, procedures, or norms. These situations, in which positive expectations are based on the elimination or reduction of alternatives, have been referred to as control (Edelenbos & Eshuis, 2012). While distinct from trust, control inevitably conditions trusting processes and is thus essential to any study of trust (Möllering, 2005).

The challenge with the term “control”, however, is its primary association with relation-specific structures (Costa & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007; Edelenbos & Eshuis, 2012; Inkpen & Currell, 2004; Vlaar et al., 2007), thereby excluding broader institutional norms and rules. Yet, contextual structures and socially sanctioned norms and values are not less (re)produced in inter-

organizational relationships than are internal procedures and monitoring practices (Giddens, 1979; Möllering, 2005). Therefore, by drawing on Yamagishi and Yamagishi (1994), this article adopts the term “assurance” rather than “control” to emphasize the inclusion of all kinds of structures reducing rather than suspending contingency.

Finally, when experience of contingency leads to undesirable expectations about the other, the situation may be one of distrust. Distrust is characterized by negative expectations about the other’s future performance and use of alternatives. As pointed out by Luhmann (2000), trust and distrust are functionally equivalent: they both actualize a future despite the existence of contingency, but in the case of trust the future is positive while in the situation of distrust it is negative (p. 93). It should be noted that even though one may distrust another person in one respect, this does not preclude trusting the same person in another respect (Kramer & Cook, 2004; Lewicki, 2006). Thus, trust and distrust may co-exist, yet it remains an empirical question how much skepticism a trusting relationship can bear.

### **Cases and methodology**

Having introduced the two main concepts, this section presents the cases and how the need, development and management of (dis)trusting was explored. Beginning with the selected cases, the PPPs were promised confidentiality and so will be called Alpha and Omega in this paper. The choice of names is purely related to timing: Alpha was studied at the beginning of its partnership, while the Omega interviews took place at the end of its partnership. Both partnerships were based on three-year contracts between a municipality and a private provider in the healthcare field. Catalyzed by financial pressures on the public side, both were concerned with improving service and reducing expenditures.

Prior to the PPPs, both municipalities provided the particular service in-house. Also, for both municipalities, collaborating with a private provider in a partnership was a new experience, although they had tried less relational forms of cooperation in other services (e.g. outsourcing, agency-like solutions). Finally, while PPPs are defined as joint efforts, the partners were responsible for distinct tasks: the private partner was seen to provide expertise and funding, while the public partner was expected to learn, provide important information, and improve along with the private partner.

Since the purpose of the research was to explore trust in strong relational PPPs, Alpha and Omega were chosen primarily because of their strong relational contracts. In particular, Omega was selected because difficulties with the partnership had been reported, offering an opportunity

to explore the challenges of managing and building trust. On the other hand, Alpha provided an opportunity to observe the early evolution of trust, since the study began just after the contract had started and followed the process for a period of eight months. The choice of such a “premature” case left the research open to many possibilities; as it happened, Alpha turned out to be rather distrusting. As a result, the analysis of how managers deal with the need for trust in strong relational PPPs provides insights in challenges rather than successful actualizations of a joint future despite the existence of alternatives.

While some background material from steering group meetings and general descriptions were used to form an understanding for the cases, the analysis is based on the partnership contracts and interviews with relevant managers. Observations of one steering group meeting in each case were further used throughout the interviews, as they alone were not sufficient as to give insights about the managers’ experiences and whether or not they included a suspension of doubts. Given the processual approach, the study focused on how managers experienced trust (or distrust) and how they were enabled or limited by their experience with the co-evolving assuring mechanisms. While a contract may frame a future partnership, it only does so as experienced by the involved managers. Still, experiences are inherently related to their embedding structures as well as the remaining contingency. Thus, processes are observed as endogenous and inherently relational.

Consequently, the interviews were semi-structured, open to exploring the managers’ PPP experiences while still focusing on the relationship between the partners and its development over time. In order to learn about any (dis)trusting or assuring expectations, the interviewer interposed probing “what if” and “why (not)” questions throughout the interview. Since the responsibility for the relationship shifted among persons, both top and middle managers from both partner organizations were interviewed. At Omega, an intermediate manager was interviewed instead of the middle manager. As the middle managers in Alpha were interviewed twice, the study is based on ten approximately 1h interviews conducted in 2011/2012. An overview of all interviewees (with their names changed) is shown in Figure 1. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Nvivo 10 computer software, which helped to structure the data thematically and processually. All quotations from case materials are my own translations from Danish.

**Figure 1: Overview of interviewed managers**

	Alpha		Omega	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
Top Management	Peter	Frank	Andrew	Bill
Intermediate Management			Chris	
Middle Management	Howard	Paul <sup>a</sup>	Joe <sup>b</sup>	Thomas

*Note:* All interviewees have been given pseudonyms.

<sup>a</sup> This person was interviewed twice.

<sup>b</sup> I was not able to get conduct an interview with Joe but got the opportunity to talk to Chris, the intermediate manager instead

**Strong relational PPPs and the need for trust**

The first analysis explores the question of why trust plays such a significant role in relational PPPs. This will be addressed in two steps. First, it will be shown that strong relational contracts not only expect to adapt to future changes but address future contingency by incorporating it explicitly into the contract. Second, it is argued that it is the partnership’s spreading of contingency in time and space that explains the inherent need for trust when forming and living strong relational PPPs.

*The Production of Contingency.* The research literature widely acknowledges that any exchange relation is inherently complex and relational rather than a simple performance of a discrete contract. This has been discussed both within law discourses (Macaulay, 2003; Macneil, 1974; Teubner, 2000) and in the field of inter-organizational relations and PPPs (Bradach & Eccles, 1989; English & Baxter, 2010; Reeves, 2008). As Macaulay (2003) remarks, there is always a “gap between the real deal and the paper deal” (p. 45); thus the contract is more than its written words. The literature offers three explanations: any contract (1) bears a multiplicity of meanings dependent on the observer (or performer), (2) is always already embedded in complex social structures, and (3) has a processual character (compare Macaulay, 2003; Teubner, 2000).

In other words, even if we strive or act as if we are able to capture all future contingencies, “it is difficult to write complete contingent claims contracts (allowing for uncertain events)” (Parker & Figueira, 2010, p. 99).

However, there are differing degrees of relationalness across differing PPP forms, as discussed earlier (Brown et al., 2007). In the case of PFI/PPPs, for example, it can be argued that they attempt to design rather specific contracts and although they may accept their inevitable incompleteness, they tend to “[treat] documents... as if they were the complete expressions of the contracts” (Macaulay, 2003, p. 79). In turn, the relational dimension in such PPPs evolves as extra-contractual, where “contracting parties work to preserve a relationship, despite difficulties in adhering strictly to contractual obligations” (English & Baxter, 2010, p. 291). In other words, the relational dimension in such PFI/PPPs usually lies outside the contract, as a consequence of unavoidable changes throughout very long contract periods (between fifteen and thirty years). Still, since the initial aim is to actualize as much of the future as possible in the contract language, they may be considered weak relational contracts (Macneil, 1974).

In contrast, strong relational PPPs go beyond an acceptance of incompleteness and move it to the heart of the contract. This observation leads Andersen (2012) to state that partnerships “are about committing to a future commitment..., a partnership is a promise about future promises” (p. 213). Thus, where a discrete contract “in a sense denies the future by pulling it into the present, ... [a relation] recognizes the future and leaves it in position” (Macneil, 1974, p. 803). Still, the future is captured as a time where partners are expected to live up to their relational obligations and achieve the overall goal. This may be illustrated by the following excerpt from the Omega contract:

The agreement’s greater objective is to establish a collaboration that may initiate a lasting reduction of expenses... and a decrease of the number of people ... [receiving the municipal service in question in the contract]. The agreement’s objective is furthermore to specify and describe the collaboration’s character... and the partners’ mutual obligations related to the collaboration.

The excerpt emphasizes that the agreement is far from obligation-free, yet the duties are related to an overall objective and a future collaboration between the two partners rather than specific promises about the input. This is also reflected when the public top manager in Alpha, Peter, states that “there were many degrees of freedom to adapt things so as to give us the most effectiveness. In the end, we do agree what the final objective should be”. His private counterpart, Frank, elaborates along the same lines that “[i]t feels a lot like one should be

committed to the collaborative organization” given that the content is not specified in the contractual agreement. In other words, it can be argued that partnerships spread contingency in time and space.

Finally, future contingency is not only present during the formation of a partnership or strong relational PPP: it is fundamental to the partnership’s life as well. In other words, if it were not for a continuous experience of various future possibilities, there would not be anything to partner around. Although the overall aim is rather specific in the contract and there is even a termination date, the specific futures remain open and this contingency is expected to be continuously (re)produced until the day of separation (compare also Andersen, 2012). In conclusion, relational PPPs do not treat documents as if they represented the real deal: they expect the real deal to happen between the lines in the relationship.

*Trust as Constitutive for Dealing with Partnership Contingency.* The previous discussion has shown how strong relational PPPs such as Alpha and Omega spread contingency in time and space, thereby creating dependency on a future relationship between the partners. In the following discussion, it will be shown how the future relationship is addressed in the contract, and that there is no way around trusting as a means of handling partnership-contingency. Finally, the analysis will demonstrate how the need for trust multiplies.

In the cases of Alpha and Omega, the two PPP contracts clearly express the need for a future relationship. In addition to the overall objectives and financial incentives, both contracts emphasize the necessity for committed partners, as illustrated by the following excerpt from Alpha’s contract:

The partners *shall* participate *loyally* in the joint organization ... The partners *shall* ceteris paribus contribute to the fulfillment of the agreement in a *loyal* and *fair* way that is suitable for the partnership and a flexible solution of eventual challenges related to the partnership. [Italics added]

Here, the document describes something that is difficult to relate to in legal discourse and which would, in the event of failure and accusation, exceed the capabilities of the legal system (Macaulay, 2003). However, by including such a passage both partners explicate that they are well aware of their future vulnerability and the need for collaborative commitment.

Thereby the excerpt also emphasizes that the future remains contingent and unplanned: it is not the contract but continuous active involvement that is to create the joint future. As identified earlier, trusting is exactly what can enable future collaboration to suspend doubts about a not

legally assured future. Trust allows partners to operate as if the future were certain, while leaving alternatives in place. Therefore, trusting becomes constitutive for strong relational PPPs, as it enables managers to deal with an ever-contingent partnership future by bracketing— but not reducing or eliminating—the contingency.

This need for trust is not confined to the negotiating managers, nor is it limited to one point in time. Rather, PPPs require constant collaborative efforts and usually require the involvement of more than two collaborating top managers. Thus, the need for trust multiplies both in time (as the partnership is formed and evolves) and in space (as more and more people are involved in several partnership actions). The significance of trusting in such strong relational PPPs is expressed by Frank, the private top manager in Alpha when stating that “[I]t is very trust dependent, the model, and very relationship dependent. Much more than I thought it would be when we made it.”

### **How managers cope with the multiplying need for trust**

The previous analysis has shown that relational PPPs are trust dependent in multiple ways as the partnership evolves. The following analysis will study how the need for trust is managed by exploring trusting and assuring experiences of Alpha and Omega. This will be approached in four steps. First, the analysis will focus on the formation phase, followed up by, second, an exploration of the preparation of the municipal organization for partnership. Third, the partnership (contract) phase is analyzed, identifying four challenges that complicated trusting relationships. Fourth and finally, the consequences of failing to build trusting relationships at the middle management and employee level are discussed.

*The formation of Alpha and Omega: When Trusting Enables.* In both municipalities, the decision to enter a strong relational PPP was as much an expression of the need for change as it was an attempt to create new solutions that would not be possible without a partner. The partnership was perceived to be the most flexible, adaptive, and financially convincing solution to a problem that needed to be addressed in all events. The idea to form a partnership was submitted personally to municipal decision-makers by the two top managers of the private organizations.

The interviews with the two municipal top managers highlighted that there had been a number of assuring mechanisms that convinced them that the partnership model was a good solution. First, there was a need to change something and limited financial resources to do so.



While not the only solution, a PPP was perceived to provide the most viability for the future, while stressing the public budget the least. Second, the private provider would bear most of the financial investment (and risk) and only profit if the mutually agreed objectives were met, and thus the PPP solution assured a rather limited risk for the municipality. Still, third, not meeting the mutually agreed upon objectives was not risk free for the public organizations given that they would miss their budgetary goals and would still need to improve the service. So, there were clear incentives for all the PPP partners to reach the joint objective and reducing the risk to fail.

However, the PPP concept was also convincing because it left the exact details of how, what, and when to be decided jointly in the future, and to take the individual needs of the partnering municipalities into account while doing so. Thus, as the public top manager in Alpha, Peter, puts it: “how we design... [the partnership] afterwards, we need to find out together”. The need for collaboration rather than specific and discrete contracts was doubtless perceived as a strength by the decision-making managers. Yet the consequent future risk and uncertainty were also recognized by Chris, the intermediate public manager in Omega:

Just because it functions in Beta [another PPP], well, one cannot not just say, then it also will function in Omega or the other way around. Due to the fact that we are organized differently. And there is something historically, there is something politically, there are all kinds of things—thus we just need to make our own experiences. We cannot say, well, it’s working out there, it’ll also work out here.

Thus, the past plays a decisive role in finding a joint partnership future and the openness of the PPP agreement is exactly what enables individual solutions to be created collaboratively. Yet, it is also risky, but obviously all senior managers were able to suspend their doubt about an eventual failure of the partnership. But what trusting cues were perceived by the municipal managers, so that they could accept and believe in the contingent PPP future?

Here, both of the municipal senior managers were open about the need to trust in the private provider’s competence and reliability. Interestingly, in both Alpha and Omega the municipal managers already trusted their private counterparts in this respect due to previous exchange relationships with them. This was not only important to choosing a partner, but also played a decisive role in forming positive expectations toward the PPP. This is highlighted by the public top manager in Omega, Andrew, when explaining the PPP decision: “It was the combination of the way of thinking, the product, the investment concept and then the relation, the credibility.” Peter, the public top manager in Alpha, was even more open when stating, “I must say that it

also to a big extent is based on the history and the trust I had with Frank [the private top manager], that I felt entirely safe with this.” Thus, the willingness and ability to jump into a directed but still thoroughly contingent partnership future was very much based on positive past experience with the other person, enabling decision-makers to suspend doubts about an eventual future failure.

However, it would be hasty to think of this as nepotism, as the public top managers clearly stated that it was the previous experience of ability and reliability rather than a friendship that enabled them to eventually entrust the private provider with a future partnership. Thus, the fact of the previous relationship did not make the managers feel obliged to choose the partnership. Rather, it was a mixture of competence-based and knowledge-based trust between the top managers that convinced them that they could use the partnership potentials even though there was some risk of failure. Hence, here we see a mutual strengthening relationship between trust and the PPP contract, where the latter depends on previously built trust and simultaneously enables for and depends on future trust.

The existence of personal trusting relationships is not surprising, given the earlier discussed need for trust when entering a partnership with many possible futures. But it is at least a stumbling point when considering another assuring mechanism that public organizations must follow when they exceed a threshold sum, as defined by the European Union in the Public Procurement Directive. It is to some extent a paradox that a formalized process with little mutual contact is meant to secure the best possible match for a future relationship. Even though this directive ensures equal access to all market players, it must be difficult for potential private providers to convince municipal decision-makers of their competence and ability in one or two official meetings, when others have had the opportunity to prove their value in previous relationships.

Still, the procurement process was valued as significant by the public top managers, not least as a way of legitimizing their choice beyond trust, given that the latter is not officially a valid criterion. This conflict between competition-assuring procurement rules and the collaborative need for trust is also visible in the municipal top managers’ evaluations. Peter in Alpha explained:

This does not mean that we chose the private provider because I knew Frank. There were objective criteria, which we had put forward and where they had scored ... But I also had trust because I also know the persons that sit there.

In Omega Andrew said “I am aware of that there is something formal, that it should be announced publicly, but if we for now forget about this dimension, the actual start was the relation and knowledge between a customer and provider from earlier relationships.”

In other words, the procurement rules were welcomed to ensure some competition and to legitimize the partner choice; at the same time, the need for trust in a future collaboration was not met by the limited dialogue possibilities within the procurement process. Thus, it can be argued that the interplay between procurement processes and the need for trust is mutually weakening rather than reinforcing, given that the need for trust at least partly devalues the competitive control of the tender process. Even though dialogues and quality criteria were included in the tender, the managers did not leave any doubt about its potential to assure competition rather than collaboration. They chose to cope with the latter by trusting beyond procurement processes, giving an advantage to the chosen private provider and a disadvantage to other potential providers.

*Preparing the organizations to partner.* Thus far, the managers in Alpha and Omega seemed to have coped easily with the trust demands in strong relational PPPs. However, the top managers were also aware of the need for mutual trust beyond their personal relationships, and here Peter (Alpha) and Andrew (Omega) differed with respect to how their organizations were prepared for the partnership.

In Alpha, Peter followed an inclusive strategy: the municipal team affected by the partnership was included in the decision-making by having the right to veto the PPP. Peter explained this strategy by referring both to the general need to create a partnership approval on all levels, given that future changes were dependent on organizational collaboration, and to the particular situation in his municipality, where previous experience with the private provider in another area had been difficult. This difficulty was also reflected in the public middle manager Howard’s words: “When we suddenly heard it was... [that private firm] it was far from a bed of roses because... [they] had been here before and it was absolutely no success”. In turn, a general skepticism toward the inclusion of private providers in municipal tasks on the middle management and employees’ level was aggravated by poor experiences with the particular private provider.

Subsequently, there was an attempt to (1) remodel the municipal (joint) past, (2) convince municipal staff that the private firm had changed since the past negative experiences, and (3) envision the joint future as something completely different from the past. In the first instance,

there was a great focus on reframing the past as a failure of outsourcing rather than a failure of the private firm itself. It was not a denial of previous problems, but it was about changing the memory to be about a fault of the outsourcing structure rather than the provider. Second, the private provider presented itself as a learning organization that actively responded to past failures by changing. Building upon the first two, the future was then presented as different from past experiences, since both the future structure of the cooperation and the present (future) provider would be different.

In the end, these efforts succeeded, supported by the experience of past difficulties by a municipal team “screaming for help” (as Howard, the public middle manager, put it) and their awareness that a refusal meant “that the pressure would just be put on them” (Peter, the public top manager). Consequently, it may be argued that the team’s acceptance of the partnership reflected not only a suspension of doubts but also a perception that the future without the partnership would be “even worse”.

In Omega, the top and intermediate managers employed a convincing strategy, where the team was regularly informed about the progress of the partnership formation and the procurement process. At the same time, they focused on the many advantages of such a partnership, promising inclusion, easing the workload for employees, and the possibility of more education. Chris, the public intermediate manager, commented on this:

Well, they were regularly informed and I also think that there were somewhat skeptical in this phase. But we had so many problems with regards to the employees that somewhere I also think they thought: “Yes that can also help us”. And then it was presented for them ... and they could see how much they would be able to be a part of this... At that point there were not many daring to say out loud that it was a bad idea.

This quote highlights that, in Omega, the main focus was on emphasizing the negativity of the past as the catalyst for future success. The partnership was presented as the change necessary to secure a positive future for the organization, and its accomplishment in an inclusive manner. Even though Chris identified some lingering skepticism— at least retrospectively—this did not lead him to doubt that future collaboration and trust of his team was possible.

With regard to the middle managers, in both Alpha and Omega the top managers did not express any doubt that they would be loyal and collaborative when told. Thus, they all relied on the hierarchical structure of the municipalities, where orders would be followed, although those orders were supported by a general belief that the partnership concept was convincing in itself. In the two private organizations, the middle managers were simply expected to partner in the

future, since this was a condition of their employment. In contrast, little effort was used to prepare the private employees, which also explains this section's main focus on the municipal organizations.

*Entering the partnership phase: When trusting is challenged.* The previous two sections have shown how trusting facilitated the formation of partnerships, as well as how the multiple organizational levels were prepared (or expected) to form mutual trusting relationships. While the formation phase requires trust to design a joint future, the partnership phase not only depends on a continuous (re)production of trust to fill the contractual framework, but it also is the phase where initial trust can be affirmed or altered. Put differently, we now turn from words (be they spoken or written) to actual practices, and the creation of a joint partnership present and past. It also becomes apparent at this time how the prepared teams and the expected loyal municipal managers will work together with the private operational manager toward partnership goals. As indicated earlier, both PPPs had difficulties with regard to trust building and maintenance in the partnership phase and the following four subsections will present four main challenges that could be observed in both cases.

1. Initial Skepticism and Generalized Distrust. In Omega, it became apparent that the preparation of the team was not convincing enough, as employees actively opposed the partnership from the beginning. This is also illustrated by the frustration of private middle manager Thomas, when he recounted that “there were always some of the older ones sitting in a corner and gossiping” while Chris, the public intermediate manager, also admitted that

There was a lot of discussion about that we weren't letting... [the private provider] into the house. Well to some extent this is right, there was some resistance amongst the employees that have experienced a lot of shit and did not really get what we had promised them.

Following, the team's skeptical and at times even distrusting attitude towards the private partner was only reaffirmed when performance expectations were not met. Hence, the blame was immediately placed on the private provider and a spiral of distrust evolved.

In Alpha, the cautious but more positive expectations were already disappointed in the first introduction meeting after the partnership contract had started. Paul, the private middle manager, reflected that “[t]he first introduction, well it did not go too well because it was a little too concrete, too targeted and the employees thought it was totally wrong to start by checking on all their activities before getting to know them.” Hence, the fears and worries may have been

bracketed when agreeing to the partnership, but it did not take more than one joint meeting to evoke them again. The introduction of a joint monitoring effort was perceived by employees' as distrust with respect to their abilities to perform; this, in turn, created distrust about the private provider's role in this partnership. Howard also commented that the resoluteness of the presenting private middle managers scared the employees.

Overall, the immediate disappointment in Alpha shows how difficult it is to change the past and how fragile such a process can be if a joint positive history is missing. As a result of this first challenge, both Alpha and Omega started out in a situation where the public organization—although still trusting on the top-management level—was filled with initial and reaffirmed doubts about the private partner and the experience on the employee level. Such an affirmation of doubts also points towards the existence of a general skepticism about the private sector, which may also be labelled as generalized distrust (Tillmar, 2009). While it has been shown that this is not impossible to change, it nonetheless complicates trust building in both Alpha and Omega.

2. Intra- and Inter-Organizational Uncertainties. On a middle-management level it proved to be difficult to build trust in a joint positive future as internal struggles about responsibility complicated joint decision making. In Omega, there was a newly announced team manager who had to assume his new responsibilities simultaneously with the introduction of the partnership. Furthermore responsibilities were not clearly distributed across organizational levels and that internal municipal uncertainty complicated the ability to actualize a joint future with the private manager. The presence of internal difficulties is illustrated by the following quote from the public top-manager Andrew:

Chris [the intermediate manager] should in effect have said: “Andrew until there with you and from here I take it and make sure that Joe [the public team manager] makes such and such”. And Joe should have said: “Chris, did I understand this right? Then I will do so.” Or: “Chris there is no point in that because such and such.”

The latter became even more obvious in Alpha, where both the public side and the private provider had difficulties. Howard, the public middle manager, was new to his job and had not officially gotten team manager responsibilities when the partnership started. The private middle manager, Paul, was also new to his job and ended up in the position of partnership manager after the initially appointed person left a bad impression during the introductory meeting. The two new middle managers both expressed the difficulties they had finding their way, and the

challenge of creating a partnership with those difficulties in the background. As an example, Howard articulated in his first interview:

It was just recently during my summer holiday that I thought: What the fuck, it's gonna be hell to come back. ... I was going to go back to a lot of things that needed to be started and who decides what and where do we do that and ... phew!

The multiplication of uncertainty in Alpha seemed to make trust practically impossible, especially because the middle managers did not really know their roles and scope of possibilities. In turn, there was a period where middle managers had no expectations and focused purely on coping with everyday challenges.

While difficulties of distributing responsibilities across municipal organizational levels in Omega remained present throughout the partnership, the middle managers in Alpha reflected that the introduction of clear organizational roles as well as partnership structures eased the initial overload of uncertainty and made them more secure. Thus, the introduction of procedure and responsibility assuring mechanisms represents an important platform for enabling trust to evolve. This second challenge illustrates how fragile partnerships can be when additional uncertainty overwhelms the partnering managers and in turn disables their ability to trust while they find their way through everyday challenges.

3. Differing Rationales. While the overall objective to reduce costs in the particular healthcare service was primarily interpreted financially by the private and the public top managers, there were clearly differing priorities on the middle management and employee level. For the latter, improving healthcare services was the most important rationale, while cost reduction was a nice by-product. On the private side, the focus was clearly on creating solutions that reduced expenditures while simultaneously meeting the healthcare standards in the area. Thus, although the financial and healthcare rationales co-existed, they were prioritized differently. While this difference in priorities was just as much a conflict between top and middle management, in the partnerships, the public middle managers and teams attributed it to be a public-private dilemma. This also illustrates a general distrust toward any private provider by the public sector staff. Following, any proposal or initiative from the private middle manager was critically examined for its motives.

In Omega, these public-private confrontations were further complicated by attributing disagreements to the difference between the country and the city. Municipal staff explained the failure to build trust by referring to the lack of improvement in the healthcare service and the city attitude of the private provider, who failed to acknowledge the cautious and down-to-earth

manners typical of the municipal region. Chris, the intermediate manager, expressed this conception a little more bluntly: “You cannot take a smart city slicker and plant him here in this municipality. Well, you of course can but you really need a humble profile.” The private partner, on the other side, interpreted the public organization’s distrust as obstructing improvement and performance. It is difficult to say which came first, distrust or the failure to reduce costs and work burdens, but they were experienced as mutually reinforcing. Consequently, the spiral of distrust further accelerated in Omega.

In Alpha, the conflict between commercial and healthcare aims was mainly embodied in a public-private debate. Subsequently, Paul, the private middle manager, reflected:

There are some attitudes that linger and wait and which are never far away. And I am very much aware of that I cannot make many mistakes, if I start to initiate some bad processes and move too fast, then they feel that I am focusing on my own world, or... [my company] is only fulfilling its own mission.

This impression was also confirmed by Howard’s view that some of the healthcare concepts introduced by Paul mainly targeted cost reduction. Furthermore, he expressed that the private firm only “entered this [partnership] to earn some money on it. Of course that is what they do. And when we, well, when we are holding back, I of course understand that they get nervous. I totally understand that.” Yet, he further elaborated that his team “would like these changes; we just need to do them at our own speed.” In other words, Alpha was able to develop some trust in the partnership, while still having difficulties with the partner. Thus, there was some cautious trust in the ability to move jointly somehow.

This third challenge highlights that the various rationales that are expressed in the partnerships continuously challenge the managers when they form joint decisions that must be acceptable to them all. Gaining acceptance seems impossible when prior distrust colors any proposition negatively. This not only shows how difficult it is to build trust once distrust has become established, but it also illustrates how difficult or even impossible it becomes to manage a partnership if trusting relationships do not exist.

4. The managerial wavelength. Finally, a missing wavelength between the middle managers also complicated trusting relationships in both PPPs. In Omega, Chris, the intermediate manager, articulated:

Thomas [the private middle manager] has a hard time reading Joe [the public team manager]. Joe has... actually a quite forward body language... Thomas simply cannot interpret Joe. Thus, if I hadn’t been there, Thomas would really have thought that Joe is



against this idea.

Similarly, the missing wavelength between Paul and Howard in Alpha was problematic, especially as the partnership grew. There are two quotes from the second interview with Howard that highlight some of the consequent problems:

There is no doubt that Paul and I are still very far from each other... If you ask me whether I can be honest with him, then yes. But I don't think I always am, because it is difficult for me to be so, because we are so different.

Generally, the missing wavelength kept coming up throughout the interviews as hindering joint way-finding in the partnership. For one, it was used to explain that different possibilities were attempted on both sides; for the other it made it difficult to understand whether the agreed-upon future was interpreted in a similar manner. In turn, it was difficult to suspend corresponding doubts, so middle managers remained skeptical towards each other in both partnerships. However, in Alpha they seemed at least to be able to communicate their differences, while in Omega even this was difficult. In sum, missing personal trust between the middle managers complicates partnership practices and the actualization of a jointly agreed future vision.

Taking all the four challenges together, the partnerships may have coped with them differently but none of them was able to build a strong, trusting relationship. Furthermore, the analysis shows that the space for trust inevitably also provides space for distrust to evolve. The existence of contingency, and thus alternatives, may lead to an actualization of negative expectations. The final section illustrates and discusses the consequences of this phenomenon.

*Discussion: Disappearing partnerships?* The final question is: what happens to partnerships when trust does not exist or is very fragile? In Omega, the partnership was characterized by distrust that was continuously (re)affirmed and served as a frame for interpretation. This spiral of distrust permeated the many partnership possibilities, mainly turning them into non-possibilities. Consequently, much of the partnership future was ignored by the everyday management. Partnership-related change was avoided, since the municipal team was unwilling to become vulnerable to a private partner they felt was only in it for the money and did not understand the ways things were done locally. The private provider also lost faith in the public team because of their opposition to most of the proposed changes. It should be noted that the interviewed managers also expressed some positive partnership moments, but overall the missing trust was reflected in a slowly evaporating partnership.

At the end, the partnership even became politicized, when the private CEO and the mayor of the municipality met to discuss how to pressure the partnering parts of their organizations into meeting the agreed objectives. Thus, they fell back on specific obligations and power and agreed on further monitoring to move into the final phase of the partnership. The inability to produce trust and interact as partners left the CEO-level to pull the future into the present by actualizing some specific tasks whose completion needed little trust and few partnership efforts. Hence, although the future became actualized as a joint project again, it did so in a discrete way, typical of outsourcing contracts rather than strong relational PPPs.

In Alpha, the analysis has shown a similar, yet slightly more positive, development. Still, here it was also difficult to build and reproduce trust between the partners while some skepticism and weak distrust survived throughout the interview period. Howard reported that he held back and made decisions that supported his team rather than the partnership. As a result, the municipal team's strategy seemed to be that of "as much improvement and as little partnership as possible". Subsequently, in Alpha the partnership disappeared to some extent, living on the surface but disintegrating in everyday way-finding. It should, however, be mentioned that Alpha was only nine months into the partnership at the end of the interviews. Although trusting can emerge out of the ongoing present (and thereby relates to the distrusting and skeptical past, it is not impossible to turn the situation at Alpha around.

The purpose here is not to judge the disappearance of the partnership as good or bad. Still, if aiming towards strong relational PPPs, a trusting relationship is indispensable and if the latter cannot be achieved it may be useful to change the form of cooperation into a less trust dependent one. However, that will inevitably make the joint future less open and the cooperation less flexible to adapt to future changes and environment-specific challenges.

### **Conclusion: Trust as constitutive and distrust as dissolving**

Trust is constitutive for strong relational PPPs, where the joint future is framed and incentivized but not planned in detail. By spreading contingency in time and space, these PPPs enable flexibility and continuous focus on possibilities, but their success is inherently dependent on trusting relationships. Trust is constitutive because it allows partners to form positive expectations about each other despite the existence of alternatives. Thus, when Andersen (2012) concludes that "[p]artnerships are fragile possibility-making machines intended for long-term perspectives for the future, but deeply dependent on present support and intensity" (p. 229), the analysis shows that such support and intensity is trust-dependent.

Second, this article shows that the need for trusting multiplies as the PPP evolves in time and as more levels of the partner organizations are involved in the (re)production of the joint future. Time not only allows for trust to be built by altering pasts and future; it is also what creates the need for continuous actualizations of a positive future, as differing tasks have to be handled. Also, differing levels of the organizations are involved with time, and need to be trusting in order for a positive joint partnership future to evolve. While previous studies have explored the interrelationship of trust on various organizational levels (Svärd, 2013), this article shows that trust cannot be transferred easily but active trust building is necessary on all levels involved in the partnership.

Third, the analysis of the two cases Alpha and Omega shows that trust and assuring mechanisms co-evolve, supporting previous insights from Edelenbos and Eshuis (2012). While a number of assuring mechanisms have been shown to strengthen the evolution of trust (e.g. partnership procedures and hierarchies), others weakened its development (e.g. monitoring and procurement rules). Yet, it is also shown that trust may find its own way despite the existence of strong procedural controls. Going beyond the insights of Edelenbos and Eshuis, this article illustrates that trusting and assuring can be mutually constitutive, as in the case of strong relational contracts where a trusting relationship is critical both at the outset and throughout the partnership. In other words, while trust and assuring are inherently co-evolving they may do so in various ways and relationships.

Fourth, the two cases demonstrate the difficulties related to the multiplying need for trust in PPP experiences and the consequences hereof. The challenges are related to a generalized distrust towards the private sector, a perceived public-private conflict about commercial and healthcare rationales, missing procedural and responsibility structures, and—not least—the difficulties middle managers have interpreting and understanding each other when a joint wavelength is missing. While the latter two factors may be related to any strong relational contract, the public-private challenges are specific to PPPs. The difficulties to building trust and the dominance of distrust and skepticism in the two cases illustrates that the space for trusting inevitably also opens up the possibility of distrusting relationships. The consequence of developed distrust is an evaporation of the partnership form.

Overall, the insights from the two empirical cases reinforce the initial outlined argument that trust is constitutive for strong relational PPPs: It is the Vitamin D that enables and creates partnership life and as such needs to be continuously supplied. When the latter fails, strong

relational PPPs disappear and thereby involved organizations also miss the opportunity to manage the future for what it is: open, changing, and continuously moving.

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# **Article 4: Towards an embedded and processual understanding of inter-organizational trust: Empirical insights from public-private partnerships in Denmark and Germany**

Under review in:

*Organization Studies*

## **Abstract**

This article explores the need, development and management of inter-organizational trust in public–private partnerships (PPPs) in Denmark and Germany. Emphasizing a processual and embedded approach towards the study of trust, the article draws attention towards trusting as a situated, concrete and ongoing experience. It also highlights the importance to acknowledge trust as based on contingency rather than assuring mechanisms such as contracts, legislation and organizational structures. The empirical analysis of managerial experiences in two Danish and to German PPPs for service delivery illustrates how trusting processes are embedded in but not predestined by national and public–private environments as well as previous experiences and future expectations. Furthermore it highlights that despite emerging differences between the two countries trust is decisive to all managers as to be able to deal with future contingency, be it as part of the contracts in Denmark or beyond the contracts in Germany. Finally, while there are emerging trusting patterns, these are no prescription for trust-building but rather emphasize that inter-organizational trust is no simple input–output relationship and requires continuous work and (re)actualizations in the specific setting where it is experienced.

## **Keywords**

Trust, public-private partnerships, process theories, case study



## Introduction

‘Trust’s vital role in securing sustainable relations among disparate parties, especially in ambiguous situations characterized by uncertainty ... is now well established’ (Dietz, Gillespie, & Chao, 2010, p. 4). In this vein, scholars across a wide range of disciplines have shown interest in measuring and exploring the role, impact and development of trust in exchange relations. Most research highlights the positive effect of trust in inter-organizational relations (IORs) such as more efficiency, better outcomes, higher profits, more satisfaction and lower transaction costs (Klijn, Edelenbos, & Steijn, 2010; Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006; A. Zaheer, McEvily, & Perrone, 1998). Given its significance, much focus has been devoted to the antecedents of trust or how it may be built (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; McAllister, 1995; Schilke & Cook, 2013). These attempts towards finding more general patterns have outlined how trust may be classified into different types depending on its antecedents, its objects/subjects, and not least the progress of the relationship.

Yet, such universalistic approaches towards trust-building have two main challenges. A first one concerns the lack of context in such models and questions the possibility of generalizations across cultures (R. Bachmann, 2010; Kramer, 2006). Zaheer and Zaheer (2006) even argue that ‘by ignoring the institutional and cultural embeddedness of trust in different national contexts, research may be reaching erroneous conclusions’ (p. 22). A second critique of such universalistic approaches is their ignorance of contingency and foundational fluidity of the social world where trust is not just a linear, step-wise process but in need of a continuous (re)modelling of pasts and futures (Möllering, 2013).

The article addresses these two challenges by emphasizing the need for a more processual understanding of *trusting* between organizations and to focus on ongoing, concrete and situated experiences rather than abstract sequential models and measurements (Hernes, 2014; Möllering, 2013; Wright & Ehnert, 2010). Following a processual understanding, the article first of all emphasizes the need to keep a distinction between assurance mechanisms (e.g. sanctioning contracts, rules, monitoring) and trust. While inherently related and mutually conditioning, they are not to be conflated. Second, the article explores how national and public–private environments are (re)created in the need, development and management of inter-organizational trust. For this purpose, it draws on managerial experiences from four public–private partnerships (PPPs) in two differing countries (Germany and Denmark). Thereby, the article also provides important practical insights for the management of PPPs.

The findings of the empirical analysis first of all highlight that trust is necessary in PPPs to overcome the inevitable uncertainty related to the future. The need for trusting reflects national differences in so far as in Denmark trusting becomes part of a strong relational contract while in Germany trusting goes beyond a weak relational contract. Nevertheless, trust becomes important in all four cases not because of assurance mechanisms but because of the future possibilities they create. Secondly, the analysis also points to public–private specific challenges and developments. While the following of public procurement rules is equally valued to secure value for money, so is the importance of trust in the future partners' competence and integrity besides the objective procedures. Amongst public middle managers and employees the public–private environment provokes a generalized distrust towards the private sector challenging the relationship-building. Finally, the discussion outlines that a more hierarchical steering approach in German public organizations seems to limit the opportunity for distrust to continue while the self-steering approach in Danish municipalities allows for sceptical attitudes to establish themselves.

The remaining part of the article is structured as follows: It starts out with introducing a processual definition of trusting highlighting its inherent relatedness, yet also distinctiveness to assurance mechanisms. Thereafter, a discussion of existing research on national differences underlines the importance to observe institutional bases as assuring mechanisms rather than explanations for trust. The subsequent section introduces the focus on PPPs in Germany and Denmark leading to a presentation of the four selected cases. This is followed by a section on methodology and methods clarifying the interviewing procedures and background material. The analysis, then, explores and compares the interplay between trusting and assuring in four process-specific sub-sections. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main findings and suggests some future research allays.

### **Trusting in IORs**

The interdisciplinary interest in trust has not only strengthened the knowledge on trust but also contributed to the elusiveness of the concept. However, there can be identified some basic features that most authors seem to agree on and that are mainly based on the articles from Mayer and colleagues (1995) and Rousseau and colleagues (1998). Following these, trust includes (1) positive expectations, (2) the willingness to be vulnerable and (3) a relation to a trustee. Although indicated by both articles, they miss out to highlight the constitutive importance of (4) future contingency usually perceived in the form of as risk and uncertainty and (5) the

suspension of doubts or leaps of faith as discussed by, for example, Möllering (2001, 2006), Luhmann (2000) and Lewis and Weigert (1985). In this article (6) the embeddedness of trust in time and space will be presented as central to a more processual understanding.

In an inter-organizational setting it has been discussed whether it is the organization or its members that develop inter-organizational trust (Kroegeer, 2011; Möllering, 2006). Following a processual approach, inter-organizational trust is a change in locus rather than nature (Dibben, 2000). In other words, inter-organizational trusting takes place on the individual level but refers to an inter-organisational setting. While a single manager thus indeed experiences inter-organisational trust he/she is far from the only one and neither his such trust limited to interpersonal relationships with another manager.

The remaining section will introduce and discuss the importance of time and space for the conceptualization of inter-organizational trusting. First, an absence of space and time is identified to be the source for our awareness for contingency and it is shown how trusting accepts contingency rather than trying to hide it. Second, although trusting is based on an absence in time and space, it also happens in time and space. Thus, temporality and embeddedness are presented to be inherent for a processual approach. Third, while trusting is inevitably enabled and limited by assurance that make the future more predictable, the latter should not be conflated with trusting but rather be observed as part of the embedding environment. Finally, the section concludes with a processual definition of inter-organizational trusting.

#### *Trusting in the absence of time and space*

Although we do not know what future technology may bring, for now we are bound to space and time. Beginning with space, we may be able to monitor our business partner but we cannot be in two places at the same time and neither can we experience what our business partner experiences. In other words, we can never be sure about what happens in other places and what our business partner is up to. Furthermore, we cannot escape the present from within which we may perceive and create our past and future but cannot go back or forth in time. In turn, it is our inescapable being in time and space that turns the future inevitably open and contingent.

Nonetheless, it is foremost an ontological stance to observe the future as inevitably contingent as we have found many ways to assume at least a provisional closure of the past and the future as we move along in time (Helin, Hernes, Hjorth, & Holt, 2014). Hence, we all form expectations and actualize the future and while some of these may be based on a continuation of

the past into the future, others involve a reflective dealing with other possibilities. Trusting refers to the latter experience of an absence in time and in space leading to an awareness for future contingency (Giddens, 1990p. 33). Following, a trusting person actualizes a positive future although he/she is aware of its uncertainty and potential failures. A trusting person is able to suspend doubts (Möllering, 2001) about someone or something and ‘live as if certain rationally possible future events will not occur’ (Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p. 969).

### *Trusting in time and space*

The suspension of doubt is however not only based on a perception of the future as bearing multiple possibilities but also as ‘shaped by ... previous experiences and ... historical experiences of others’ (Wright & Ehnert, 2010, p. 115). Even if partners in an IOR have no joint past, they will inevitably be informed by their individual past experiences framing the present experience of the other. Furthermore, given the impossibility of experiencing a moment in its original twice, trusting is not firm once doubts are suspended. In other words, also apparently stable trusting relationships need ‘to be continuously (re)produced’ (Möllering, 2013, p. 290). Hence, a processual understanding of trusting in time highlights that there is continuity in change and change in continuity. Following, the study of trusting processes needs go beyond models of linear and sequential change and focus on the ongoing experiences that make cooperating actors remodel their past and consequently their trusting (or non-trusting) future.

Turning to space, these pasts, presents and futures are not just free-floating dimensions but rather inter-organizational processes also are embedded in their environments limiting and enabling the possibility of trusting to evolve. In this vein, Zaheer and Zaheer (2006) state that ‘what trust means, when it matters, the objects of implicit trust – all may vary across contexts’ (p. 22). Thus, any trusting relationship is inseparable from its environment. Yet, the conceptualization of context in a processual perspective deviates from usual assumptions about an autonomous outside exercising unidirectional influence on organizations and its members. Rather, it maintains that trusting experiences indeed connect to the situation and environment within which they take place, yet, thereby they also (re)produce and/or change it (Giddens, 1979). Furthermore, a process view also only ‘considers context to be important ... as it is responded to, and hence experienced through the [inter] organization’s response to environmental factors’ (Hernes, 2014, p. 56).

### *Trusting, trustworthiness and assurance*

The future about which a potential truster forms positive expectations is of course not any future, but the future performance of another, be it an individual, organization or institution/system. We should therefore add that such positive expectations are based on the perception of the other in the light of one's past and the situation/embeddedness. While, trusting cues play a fundamental role for trusting, one should be cautious as not to explain trust away when exploring such sources for trustworthiness and trust. The latter may happen when referring to cues that reduce future risks and make alternatives almost impossible as for example characteristic for studies of institution-based trust (R. Bachmann & Inkpen, 2011; Lane & Bachmann, 1996; Zucker, 1985) or deterrence-based trust (Hagen & Choe, 1998). Both trust-types refer to sources that sanction alternatives and thus mainly assure their absence.

In this vein Yamagishi and Yamagishi (1994) note that '[t]rust requires social uncertainty, and assurance requires the lack of it' (p. 160). Following, they claim that it would be misleading to talk of trust when positive expectations are placed in one another because of an awareness of sanctioning mechanisms. Thus, while trusting cues may be perceived to increase the likelihood of the other's performance they do not reduce possibilities. Assurance mechanisms, on the other hand, refer exactly to the reduction of alternatives and as such are inherently embedding, yet not explaining trust. Still, as conditioning environment assurance mechanisms are fundamental to the study of trust (Möllering, 2005).

While many authors use the term 'control' or 'institution', this article adapts Yamagishi and Yamagishi's (1994) 'assurance' and uses the latter to encompass all kinds of controlling and institutionalized structures (i.e. procedures, monitoring practices, laws,) going beyond artificial micro–meso–macro separations. Furthermore, the focus is on assuring mechanisms as experienced and (re)produced by individuals involved in the inter-organizational relationship.

### *Definition of (inter-organizational) trusting*

Finally, let me summarise a processual understanding of inter-organizational trust. First, the focus on IORs presents a change of locus rather than the nature of trusting. Second, trusting is defined as the willingness/ability to form positive expectation about another's behaviour/performance in the future despite the perception of contingency and the possibility to be disappointed. Thus, trusting includes a leap of faith in order to live as if the future was certain. Third, trust is based on but not predestined by past experiences and the perception of trusting cues. Finally, assuring mechanisms condition the need for trust and thereby are

inherently part of the trust-embedding surrounding, yet should not be conflated with trusting. Let me illustrate the latter in the following by reviewing existing publications on inter-organizational trust across borders.

### **Inter-organizational trusting in differing national environments**

The insight that trust differs across borders is not new and has been discussed at least since the middle of the 1990s (e.g. by Fukuyama, 1995; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). However, while there are some studies focusing on national embeddedness of IORs within and across countries (e.g. Edited By Mark N.K. Saunders ... [et Al.], 2010), most research reports still tend to be acontextual (Wright & Ehnert, 2010). Furthermore, insights from studies that have explored country-specific trust are partly conflicting, which is not least based in differing conceptualizations of trust. In the following I will explore and discuss their findings in the light of the above-introduced processual approach. Thereby, the discussion also sets the scene for the empirical analyses in this article.

A first group of researchers has for example explored trust in Japan (Dyer & Chu, 2003; Hagen & Choe, 1998; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994) following the widely held conviction that Japanese interfirm relationships are characterized by a high level of trust as compared to other countries. However, Yamagishi and Yamagishi (1994) are the first to address that there seems to be a conflation of trust with assurance. In their comparison of Japan with the United States they conclude that:

Japanese society is [characterized] by mutual assurance ... derived from the stability of interpersonal and/or inter organisational relations. In contrast, what has been found to be higher in the United States than in Japan is general trust in situations lacking such assurance. (p. 160)

Following up, Hagen and Choe (1998) explore the role and forms of sanctions. However, they maintain the latter to be a type of trust (i.e. deterrence-based) and identify institutional sanctions (such as law, grading systems, quality controls) and social sanctions (such as rapid dissemination of reputation) to play a crucial role as to secure a high degree of trust in Japan. The identified sanctions reduce uncertainty and make cheating or opportunism barely possible. Thereby they seem to explain long-term collaboration rather than trust.

Another study that besides Japan includes the United States and Korea has been published by Dyer and Chu (2003) comparing the role of trustworthiness in buyer–supplier relations linking it to performance and transaction costs. Their study concludes that ‘[i]nterfirm trust, while lower

than in Japan, was actually higher in the United States than in Korea' (p. 66). In other words, they support the assumption of Japan as a high-trust country. Yet, they seem to assume simple input–output relationships between trust and trustworthiness (Möllering, 2006) and also they do not elaborate whether the experience of trustworthiness is based on a perception of actual social uncertainty or assurance mechanisms reducing such uncertainty.

Changing the scene, the Cambridge Contract Study that was conducted in the 1990s has explored the meaning, role and processes of trust in business relationship in Germany, Italy and the UK. In the course of this study Lane and Bachmann (1996) explore how differing institutional environments influence the development of trust in Britain and Germany. In their study they also include institutions as bases for trust concluding that the existence of stable environmental structures in Germany 'seem to foster trust to a high degree' (Lane & Bachmann, 1996, p. 390) while industrial relations in Britain have no such stable environment and in turn the UK is labelled to be a low-trust culture with highly personalized relationships. Later, Bachmann reverses the conclusion when he, together with Inkpen (2011), reasons that '[i]nstitutional-based trust may generally be seen as a weaker form of trust compared to interaction-based trust, i.e. trust generated on the basis of intensive face-to-face contacts' (p. 285). Yet, institutions are maintained as bases for trust.

Another exploration that is part of Cambridge Contract Study was conducted by Burchell and Wilkinson (1997) and focuses on managers' understanding, use and development of trust. They support the above-outlined insights that British managers rely much more on personal relationships than their German and Italian counterparts. Also, they show that 'strictly honouring the terms of contracts' (p. 227) is valued as more important for trust in Italy and Germany than in Britain. Yet, especially German managers also highlighted the importance of flexibility beyond and outside the contract; thus there is a clear indication that detailed contracts do inevitably leave some room for extra-contractual agency where promises want to be kept and doubts suspended. While it is exactly the 'residual uncertainty' that is central to the conceptualization of trust in this article, the authors do not themselves distinguish between the experience of risk-reducing mechanisms and the need to suspend remaining doubts.

Here, Child and Möllering (2003) introduce an interesting distinction between contextual confidence on the one hand and active trust on the other (compare also Möllering, 2006; Möllering & Stache, 2010). While to some degree similar to a distinction between personal and institutional trust, the notion of active trust refers to more than personal bonds and includes recruitment strategies and business practice transfers (p. 71). It also emphasizes the need for a

leap of faith as to bracket uncertainty and enable specific expectations about a joint future. It is the notion of active trust that comes closest to the conceptualization of trust in this article. However, 'active' is not necessarily an explicit or cognitive process but it emphasizes that uncertainty is constitutive for trust. While institutional structures frame and condition the experience of uncertainty, they do not explain why and on the basis of what someone actualizes a positive future despite the remaining uncertainty.

Thus and as already formulated by Lewis and Weigert in 1985 we should keep in mind that '[t]rust begins where prediction ends' (p. 976). It follows that high predictability is not to be equalled with high trust but rather as limiting the need for trust. On the other hand, it should also be highlighted that also assuring mechanisms are in need for trust in order to be continuously (re)produced and as such assurance and trust are mutually conditioning. Yet, such trust in institutions (or system trust) is not the focus of this study but emphasizes the significance of trust in any societal setting.

### **PPPs for service delivery in the German and Danish healthcare sector**

While the former section has focused on the national embeddedness of inter-organizational trust, the need for observing trusting in space is of course more than an acknowledgement of national patterns. As to expand the scope, the article further focuses on public–private interfaces. As also illustrated in the above-discussed publications, most trust studies have explored business relationships while only few researches have dealt with trust in a public–private environment (Brown, Potoski, & Van Slyke, 2007; Edelenbos & Eshuis, 2012; English & Baxter, 2010; Klijn et al., 2010; Swärd, 2013; Tillmar, 2009). While trusting in space of course also refers to the concrete experiences of all kinds of perceived situational cues, the latter is not ignored throughout the analysis, yet the focus is on highlighting the national and sector-specific embeddedness of trusting processes. The following paragraphs provide (1) a more specific introduction to the type of PPP chosen, (2) an explanation for the selection of the two countries and (3) a short introduction of the four cases.

Beginning with PPPs, the label has been blamed for its ambiguity and almost inflationary use (Teisman & Klijn, 2002; Weihe, 2008). On the other hand, it can also be observed that the 1992 introduced Private Finance Initiative (PFI) that was renamed PPP in 1997 seems to dominate the discourse on PPPs (Wettenhall, 2010). The challenge with the latter is that they usually refer to long-term arrangements based on detailed contracts and a distribution rather than sharing of risks and responsibilities. Thus, little may defend the use of the partnership term. In turn, the



aim was to identify PPPs that go beyond such detailed arrangements and rely on strong relational contracts where the exact how and when is to be suspended into the joint future (Andersen, 2012).

However, the latter proved difficult in Germany where contracting practices were more focused on specifying as much as possible. It follows that the identified German PPPs are based on rather weak relational contracts. Yet, given the processual approach, it must inevitably remain a question of ongoing experiences rather than written documents whether or not a partnership evolves. In a similar vein, it has been argued that any contract that goes beyond simple one-time transactions will develop a relational dimension (Macaulay, 2003; Macneil, 1974). The latter ‘contractual’ expectation of future contingency will be discussed further in the analysis.

Turning to the choice of countries, there is the widely held conviction that Germany is characterized by a highly stable and sanctioned institutional environment that is not least reflected in the earlier presented studies. However, as argued earlier, mostly the focus is on assurance mechanisms as bases for trust rather than on exploring the interplay between trust and assurance. Following, Germany is interesting as to exactly explore how such seemingly stable institutional environments are experienced to actualize an assured future and/or carry uncertainty and the perception of contingency with them. In other words, is inter-organizational trust really just embedded in well-functioning institutions or are there other contingencies that need to be dealt with?

As for Denmark, it has generally been claimed that it is a high-trust country and that trust even is the secret of the economic well-being (Karkov, 2012; Svendsen, 2012). Recently, trust has even become a political aim and a so-called trust reform was launched by the government in June 2013. Yet, is such generalized trust also reflected in inter-organizational relationships? Furthermore it has been pointed out that trust in Denmark is related to a high degree of social sanctions and homogeneity expectations (Henriksen, 2011, p. 60). Thus, one may wonder whether an incorporation of openness in a contract is a mere expression of expected social sanctions as earlier outlined with Japan or whether it is an actual allowance for uncertainty and bracketing hereof.

Finally, besides these individual reasons for selecting Denmark and Germany, they are also both part of the same legal European framework regarding the procurement phase of such partnerships (EC, 2004) and in turn make it possible to observe whether similar assurance

mechanisms are experienced differently for the need and development of inter-organizational trust.

Concluding this section, some overall characteristics of the four cases will shortly be introduced. This overview remains general as confidentiality has been promised to all involved cases. First, all PPPs include one public and one private partner and concentrate on service delivery. While the Danish cases are concerned with the management of sick-leave the German cases deal with the management, supply and development of technical equipment. Second, all PPPs were on the municipal level, yet in Germany the public partners are municipal hospitals while in Denmark they are municipal departments. Third, all PPPs were reported to be a reaction to budgetary constraints in the public organization and the belief that a PPP can help overcoming the latter. Fourth, all private providers are multi-national companies and experienced players in the healthcare sector. Fifth, the PPPs are all based on contractual arrangements that range from three years (in Denmark) to 10 years (in Germany).

Although it can be argued that the PPPs are concerned with rather different services, all cases are indirectly in contact with ill citizens and the service they provide is essential for the appropriate care-taking. Thus, there are a number of parallels but also some differences that are taken up in the analysis. An overview of the main characteristics is illustrated in Table 1. Throughout the analysis, the cases are referred to as Danish 1, Danish 2, German A and German B.

**Table 1: Overview of cases**

country	public partner	private partner	contract length	type of service	sector
Denmark	municipal department	multi-national company	3 years	management of municipal sick-leave	healthcare
Germany	municipal hospital	multi-national company	10 years	management, supply and development of technical equipment	healthcare

### **Methodology and methods: probing and interpreting trust in interviews**

Following the earlier introduced processual orientation, the focus is on concrete experiences by involved organizational members. Given the focus on management, the study concentrates on public and private managers involved in the creation and ongoing management of the PPPs. In order to get access to the managers' experiences semi-structured interviews were used. These

focus on similar themes but are open to the managers' own interpretations and experiences of the processes. The themes may be summarized as (1) the development of the relationship from the very beginning to the point of the interview, (2) the experience of trust, (3) the experience of assurance mechanisms and (4) changes in the relationship. Thus, the interviews were open enough as to be 'guided ... by the research subjects and hear from them what they feel have been the key contextualizing factors that have influenced them' (Wright & Ehnert, 2010, p. 117).

At the same time, the questions also aimed to provoke the interviewees for eventual missing or non-perceived structures. Here, a number of pilot and expert interviews helped to get an understanding of eventual ongoing processes in PPPs while case-specific PowerPoint presentations, contracts, news articles and internal documents supported more specific knowledge about the individual cases. In the two Danish cases I also participated in one steering group meeting per case and used the observations throughout the interviews. However, it was the managers' experiences that were at the centre of the interview process and the background knowledge was primarily used to follow up and from time to time challenge their initial interpretations.

When introducing the study to the interviewees, the overall topic of trust and assurance was shortly presented, yet throughout the interview the terms were mainly avoided and rather the focus was on the interviewee's dealing with (non-)contingency and future expectations. In turn, questions aimed to actively probe their experiences by asking 'what if' and 'why (not)' questions to see whether they actually were aware of contingency – be it in the form of possibilities, uncertainty or risks – or whether they primarily assumed the other to have little or no choice(s). Simultaneous, these questions motivated them to specify why something would or may not be possible.

Given the inclusion of two different countries, there is a methodological challenge that 'important information [is] visible "between the lines" in one's own language' (Welter & Alex, 2012, p. 57). Here, the advantages were that the interviewer knows both countries and languages very well which allowed the interviewees to talk in their own mother tongue and facilitated the interpretation of their experiences.

In total, 15 interviews were conducted, 10 of them in Denmark and five in Germany. In all four cases, there is at least one public and private manager, yet, in both German cases it was not possible to interview the two public middle managers responsible for the everyday management of the partnerships. An overview of the interviewed managers with their names changed can be

found in Figure 1. To keep authenticity with regards to the differing name practices, the Danish managers got first names while the German managers are referred to with last names. The exact dates and lengths of all conducted interviews and observations are provided in Appendix A.

**Figure 1: Overview of interviewees**

		<b>Public organization</b>	<b>Private organization</b>
<b>Danish 1</b>	<i>top</i>	Morten	Christian
	<i>middle</i>	Mikkel <sup>a</sup>	Anders <sup>a</sup>
<b>Danish 2</b>	<i>top</i>	Jens	Frederik
	<i>middle</i>	Kasper <sup>b</sup>	Thomas
<b>German A</b>	<i>top</i>	Mr Walter	Mr Schmidt
	<i>middle</i>		Mr Reimer
<b>German B</b>	<i>top</i>	Mr Wolf	Mr Schulze <sup>c</sup>
	<i>middle</i>		Mr Schulze <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> The middle managers in this case were interviewed twice in an eight months period

<sup>b</sup> This is the intermediate manager being interviewed. He was involved in the everyday management while still having a team (middle) manager below who was not willing to be interviewed

<sup>c</sup> The top manager decides to carry on as the project coordinator

All interviews were transcribed and the computer software Nvivo10 was used to code for (1) perceived assuring structures, (2) bases and experiences of trust and (3) bases and experiences of eventual distrust. This was followed by an exploration of processual patterns. Whereas the coding in Nvivo10 facilitated the analytical process and made it more transparent and comparable across cases it does not create more quantifiable or valid conclusions that want to be universally applicable to any German and Danish PPP in the healthcare sector.

A search for generalizability would be inappropriate for two reasons. First, from within a more positivist approach the small number of interviews, especially in the German cases, can by no means claim to be a representative sample. However, second and more important, the processual approach taken in this article is generally cautious of universalistic insights given the inescapable fluidity of time that makes prediction impossible. Therefore, and as outlined earlier,

the focus should be on concrete experiences recognizing ‘the power of examples, and that examples are contextual and personal (although not subjective) in the relational sense.’ (Helin et al., 2014). It is by exploring the managers’ dealing with trust-building in public–private partnerships that the analysis aims to provide useful insights and enrich current understandings. In any way, ‘[t]he transfer from one context to another requires understanding of both contexts ... [and] relevance is co-constructed between reader and the text’ (Wright & Ehnert, 2010, p. 120).

### **Analysing inter-organizational trusting in German and Danish PPPs**

The following analysis is divided into four sub-sections. It starts out by (1) an analysis of the decision processes regarding the PPP and the partner, followed by (2) an exploration of the contractual expectations towards the future as more or less contingent and framing the need for trust. Thereafter, a third sub-section (3) analyses how organizations beyond top management are prepared for the actual operational phase. The final sub-section (4) explores the management and development of trusting in the operational phase of the PPPs. Please note that all included quotations are own translations from Danish/German into English.

#### *Deciding for the PPP and the partner*

This first sub-section analyses how the decision-process to enter a PPP and find a partner reflects awareness for future contingency and is addressed both by assuring mechanisms and trust. The focus is on public processes as it is the public that took the decision about procuring a PPP and selecting the partner. That these formation processes do not happen independently of the private will be shown in the following. There are two main patterns that are identified. The first is related to differing previous experiences with PPPs when choosing the partnership. The second pattern concerns the process of selecting the partner being partly guided by procurement rules while also in need for trust beyond these procedures.

Beginning with the first pattern German A is the only partnership where the public organization had previous experience with PPPs in a related area. In turn, the partnership concept was well-known and the public top manager did not express any uncertainty that could not be addressed by thorough preparation. In other words, the uncertainties surrounding a PPP were perceived as reducible risks. In the other three cases, the uncertainties with regard to the partnership were unknown and initially experienced as less manageable by the public top

managers. In turn, all three cases involved extensive discussions with the potential private provider as well as conversations with already partnering public organizations.

The result of these exchanges was, however, quite different between the cases. Beginning with German B, the public top manager used these exchanges of experiences to identify risks in order to reduce them. In other words, unknown uncertainties were turned into identifiable risks enabling a reduction of the latter, which is similar to the experiences in German A.

In the two Danish cases the exchange was also used to identify future risks, yet the latter remained existent and in both cases the relationship to the potential private provider was explicitly referred to as important to suspend remaining doubts. This is for example articulated by Ove, the public top manager in Danish 2 when reflecting about the reasons for the PPP: 'It was the combination of the way of thinking, the product, the investment concept and then the relation, the credibility.' In a similar vein, also the experiences from other municipalities were used as sources for trust rather than as securing the concept. This is put nicely in the following quote from Kasper, the public intermediate manager in Danish 2: 'Just because it functions in ... [another municipality], well, one cannot not just say then it also will function ... [here] or the other way around.'

Turning to the partner selection, all public top managers referred to the need to follow public procurement procedures given the European Union's joint regulation. In other words, it was not enough to individually evaluate potential providers' bids and their trustworthiness, but equally accessible procedures had to be followed including the nomination of objective criteria. Yet, it was not enough to simply fulfil these objective criteria as for example expressed by Mr Schmidt, the private top manager in German A:

We won the competition ... and then I called ... [the public CEO] and thanked him and was happy that it came this way when he told me: 'Well, that was quite obvious ... [Mr Schmidt]!' And at his reaction I already noticed that we obviously were the only ones they were confident in could generate this solution.

Similarly, the public top manager Jens in Danish 2 stated: 'I am aware that there is something formal, that it should be announced publicly, but if we for now forget about this dimension, the actual start was the relation and knowledge between a customer and a provider.'

Generally, and as also highlighted in the latter quote, procurement rules and relations were perceived as to differing dimensions. While procurement rules were valued as important to ensure the best partner selection, they left little space to evaluate whether or not the potential private provider was able and integer enough to deal with eventual future contingency beyond

the descriptions in the bidding material. However, while public procurement rules thus potentially weakened the need and role for trust, in practice the top managers all sidestepped this limitation by supplementing the objective criteria with their perception and evaluation of the other. Interestingly, in all four cases trustworthiness was based on joint prior experience that had created the picture of the fair and competent other.

#### *The assured partnership possibility versus partnering possibilities beyond assurance*

This second sub-section will show how contractual expectations frame future contingency and thereby create the need and condition for trust in the future partnership life but also in the PPP and partner decision. Thus, while the contract is first negotiated after the PPP and partners were selected, contractual expectations were in all four cases formed long before.

In Denmark, it has been pointed out earlier that the two PPPs were based on strong relational contracts assuring joint and open rather than specific and closed futures. The following suspension of contingency into the future is clearly experienced by the involved top managers both as the opportunity for flexibility and as the source for uncertainty. With regard to future flexibility, the interviewed managers generally expressed the opportunity for individualized solutions, as for example expressed by the public top manager in Danish 1, Morten, when stating ‘there were many degrees of freedom to adapt things as to give most effectiveness for us. At the end, we do agree what the final objective should be.’ At the same time future openness was also experienced as the need for active future collaboration as illustrated by the private top manager in Danish 1, Christian, who stated that ‘[i]t means a lot that one should be committed to the collaborative organization.’

Generally, the Danish contracts left few future possibilities to sanction the other legally. Instead powerful economic incentives were included as to assure the commitment towards the mutually agreed objective. Specifically, not reaching the objectives meant a financial loss for the private provider while the public provider would miss out to reduce expenses for the service. Still, despite the financial assurance of the willingness to collaborate, the future stayed purposefully open enabling for flexibility by creating a surplus of possibilities. While the specifics of the contract were first negotiated after the partner had been selected, the general decision for a rather strong relational contract is already reflected earlier when the Danish managers experience the PPP decision as partly uncertain. Not only was the future unpredictable but the contract’s openness added further doubts that, however, were successfully suspended by all the interviewed top managers.

In the two German cases, the focus was very much on assuring a future as specific as possible. Mr Walter, the public top manager in German A, notes that ‘everything has to be precisely regulated, with lawyers, accountants, the finance office ... with everyone it must be regulated’. Also, he elaborated on the role of fines in the contract, stating that ‘it is very important that one does [include sanctions] ... in the contract, as otherwise a private company does nothing, if they do not suffer from it’. His private partner Mr Schmidt highlighted another aspect why a perfect contract needed to be specific when articulating that

we have a contract and it is continuously amended, expanded and changed in order to make sure, that if ... one of us is not there anymore, anyone can read the contract, what we do and what we live.

Hence, the detailed contract is also experienced as assuring a detailed past and continuity thereof into the future.

While the German managers thus express the need to plan as much of the joint future as possible, Mr Schmidt’s statement also highlights an expectation towards contractual changes when reality surprises. In other words, the future remains open and also Mr Wolf, the public top manager in German B, formulates that one ‘can in such a contract and such a comprehensive work not regulate everything’. Thus, despite efforts to close the future, it is still experienced as contingent, yet it is unavoidable rather than purposefully so. Flexibility is then not part of the contract but what changes and supplements the agreement. The existence of contractual expectations long before the actual negotiations is reflected when the decision for the PPP concept is perceived as assured rather than in need for trust. The PPP was expected to be based on detailed contracts and therefore not related to the possibility to fail in the first place. The nevertheless residual uncertainty of any contract was reflected when the partner decision included an evaluation of trustworthiness to move into a potentially surprising future.

Thus, the contractual expectations towards the future clearly differed between the two countries, yet contingency is experienced in all cases: When trust becomes constitutive for contingency-creating contracts in Denmark it becomes important for the inevitably contingency-confronted contracts in Germany. Still, all managers refer to the future as open – be it inevitably or purposefully, within the contract or beyond the contract. In the following two sub-sections it will be analysed how the partnering organizations deal with the need for trust after the PPP and partner decisions were taken and the contract was signed.



### *Preparing the partnership*

This sub-section focuses on how organizational preparations enable and limit the ability to form trust beyond the top management level. There are three main patterns that are identified. First, all public organizations experienced scepticism and generalized distrust towards the private provider. Second, the scepticism was actively addressed in all cases and while three cases followed an information strategy Danish 1 chose to include the employees in the partnership decision. Third, the public middle managers were in all four cases simply expected to fulfil their new role and build trusting relationships with their private counterparts. Yet, the German private top managers expressed a more active approach towards finding the right managers and not least matching them to the specific public manager.

Beginning with the first pattern, the public employees and middle managers experienced the PPPs as a loss of responsibility as the task had previously been taken care of in-house in all the four cases. Furthermore, the interviewees also referred to a generalized distrust embodied in a conflict between an economic and healthcare rationale. Interestingly, the interviewed public top managers did not relate to such a conflict but highlighted the need for economic and efficient solutions. The middle management and employee level did however refer to a public–private struggle thereby (re)producing the widely discussed public–private distinction.

Second, there were basically two differing strategies used to soften the scepticism and laying the ground for trust to develop. The first one was used in Danish 1 where the employees were given a veto-right towards the PPP decision with the specific partner. The inclusion strategy was explained by referring to previous bad experiences with the potential private provider. To convince the employees of the PPP, the top managers seem to remodel that past by making it a failure of the cooperation model rather than the private provider. In other words, the future would not be a (re)production of the past but the partnership model allowed for a much better solution. The efforts of the top managers were rewarded and the initial scepticism amongst the employees was changed into cautious trusting expectations and an approval of the PPP decision.

In the three other cases, the sceptical atmosphere amongst the employees was approached by regular updates and a presentation of the advantages of such a partnership. For this purpose, the public top managers highlighted the partnership as reconciling financial and healthcare rationales and improving quality. The contractual expectations are reflected as the inclusive and individualized future was used to convince the organization in Denmark. The German top managers on the other hand highlighted the transfer of currently responsible public employees to the private organization while maintaining their public employment status.

Turning to the third pattern, it can be observed that the middle managers were general mostly expected to take the role of the partnership coordinator on the public side. A smooth passage into the operational phase was ensured by involving them in the final phase of contract negotiations and preparations. Yet, the decision to enter a PPP was in all four cases taken without the middle managers. Concerning the match of the coordinating managers, it was the German private providers that expressed the need for active relationship management most explicitly. For example Mr Schmidt, the private top manager in German A, expressed in this respect:

The decisive factor is the project manager on the site .... [In German A] it grew rather naturally<sup>1</sup> ... but in other cases where we have looked for a project coordinator we also focus very much on the soft-skills, thus that it really is someone that can play this role.

In a similar manner Mr Schulze, the private top manager in German B, elaborates on the importance of personal trust between the middle managers: ‘this also explains why I am still ... [here], the trusting relationship was built up and I cannot say ... that now the contract is signed someone else must take on this task’. While the importance of a trusting relationship between the middle managers was also expressed by the private managers in Denmark, there were no active strategies to prepare coordinating managers or, as expressed by Mikkel, the private middle manager in Danish 1, ‘it was just to jump in at the deep end’.

#### *Living and trusting the partnership?*

The final sub-section of this analysis focuses on how the need for trusting was managed and dealt with once the partnership started and, while trust was built and maintained successfully in the German cases, the Danish cases were challenged and characterized by distrust rather than trust.

In Germany, the everyday uncertainty that was inevitably expected beyond the contract was successfully managed with trust. Following the public top managers Mr Walter and Mr Wolf, scepticism amongst the employees and also middle managers was reduced when the PPP performed in a satisfactory way and first of all did not decrease but increase healthcare quality. Following the statements of the interviewed, trusting relationships were also built between the coordinating middle managers in both cases. This is for example expressed by Mr Reimer, the private middle manager in German A, when stating that ‘the contract is important to have, but for the daily work ... other rules apply. If I sat down and read the contract every single time, I would not get anywhere.’ Following, he would be on a first-name basis with his public partner

and even drink a beer once in a while. Furthermore such trusting was experienced significant to deal with the challenges and conflicts that inevitably occurred in everyday management.

Furthermore, although the interviewed top managers left no doubt as to the importance of the middle managers' ability to manage beyond the contract, they also highlighted the significance of the top management trust in each other. Here for example Mr Schmidt, the private top manager in German A, reflected that

we know of distrust from other projects, especially when there was an exchange of persons. We had it in two big projects that the CEO changed ... And while in one project we got the new management behind us ... there is another case where we didn't succeed ... and we dissolved such a concept.

The importance of a good relationship between top managers also reflected a rather hierarchical structure where the top managers remained responsible for the content of the PPP and the coordinating managers were expected to take care of the implementation. Nonetheless, trusting relationships emerged on all levels enabling to deal with conflicts and struggles that were experienced to be inevitable in any contractual relationship and on all organizational levels.

Turning to the Danish cases, the need for continuous trust was shown powerfully as both cases were afflicted by distrusting relationships. In Danish 1 it has been outlined above that some efforts were made to change the initial distrust when including the employees in the PPP decision. The fragility of these positive expectations was experienced when the private partner made its first 'mistake' and reassured the initial picture of the private firm as inconsiderate, financially driven and overbearing. The scepticism was not only limited to the employee level but Anders, the private middle manager in Danish 1, experienced that 'there are some rather critical employees and ... [Mikkel, the public middle manager] wants to please them and, in the way in which he articulates the partnership, he distances himself from it'. Furthermore, both middle managers expressed the view that they have difficulties to find a joint way of doing things given their dissimilarity in character.

Similarly, also in Danish 2 the everyday management proved difficult. Despite the preparation a rather developed scepticism prevailed in the public organization. When the private provider had difficulties to perform as promised the negative expectations were only reconfirmed. Furthermore, cooperation between the two middle managers also proved to be difficult and a missing wavelength was experienced to lead to misinterpretations of each other.

A further challenge in both cases was ‘too much’ experienced uncertainty. In Danish 2 there were internal management struggles and a new public team manager. In Danish 1, both middle managers were new and reported that it was difficult to find their role and responsibility in the partnership. In turn, all middle managers had difficulties to form positive expectations and suspend doubts. While especially in Danish 1 the managers also referred to a number of positive experiences of the partnership and each other, scepticism consolidated itself.

## **Discussion**

The analysis has shown that the German cases were more successful to form trusting relationships beyond top management while the Danish cases struggled to build trust on all organizational levels. In the following, I will discuss whether these differing (dis)trusting experiences may be related to differing managerial practices.

Basically, it can be argued that whenever the other is experienced to have differing alternatives in the future, not only space for trust but also space for distrust is created. Thus, the awareness for future contingency can inevitably also lead to negative expectations about the other. In this vein, it has been outlined that the initially experienced uncertainty when entering the PPP led to scepticism in all public organizations. Yet, in the German cases this was slowly turned into trust while the Danish cases struggled to build and maintain trusting relationships.

Here I want to discuss differing managerial styles between the German and Danish public organizations as enabling and limiting the emergence of distrust on the middle and employee level. It has been outlined above that there is a more hierarchical approach towards creating and managing the PPP in the German cases. This is also reflected in the internal management of the public organizations and, while indeed involved and actively managed, the top managers leave no doubt that the PPP decisions were to be implemented. It should be mentioned that the missing interviews with the public middle managers make it difficult to interpret how they experienced the process, yet their private counterparts did not reflect about any relational difficulties while otherwise being very explicit about arising conflicts along the way.

In Denmark, it has also been outlined that the top managers mainly expected their middle managers and employees to commit and accept the PPP, yet despite such hierarchical expectations the everyday management was mainly left to the coordinating managers. To illustrate, Morten, the public top manager in Danish 1, for example formulated the view ‘I have difficulties to see why he [Mikkel] would not think that this is a good idea and he has been a very loyal and positive teammate all the way through’ while also stating that ‘there was no

dialogue with him about whether this was a good idea or not'. Thus, Morten's trust in Mikkel's ability to manage this partnership for the public side suspended any doubt about the possibility for scepticism to evolve.

In Danish 2 the distrusting atmosphere amongst middle managers and employees was indeed perceived by the top managers, but it was nothing that provoked active involvement in the everyday management. First retrospectively Jens, the public top manager, evaluated 'either I should have been longer down in the organization and have my fingers more involved or I should have been more concrete about who it is that has the responsibility and what it means to have the responsibility'.

In other words, self-steering practices (partly combined with some responsibility struggles) seem to allow for distrusting relationships to evolve and maintain themselves while the more hierarchical approach in the two German hospitals assured that the space for trust was not exploited as space for distrust. On the other hand it can be argued that eventual trusting bonds may be stronger when self-chosen rather than hierarchical requested. In this vein, the Danish private managers reported very good and trusting experiences in other partnerships. In other words, the discussion by no means suggests that only hierarchical structures can lead to trust but it points towards the accompanying fragility of more self-steering approaches while also highlighting that trusting processes are complex, situated and inevitable to model.

## **Conclusion**

Trusting is inherently embedded and processual and therefore should not be separated from its environment and neither should it be taken out of time. When studying inter-organizational processes the ongoing, concrete and situated experiences are central. Furthermore, the article highlights the importance to distinguish between trust and assurance while simultaneously pointing towards their inherent relationship. Still, trusting is based on an experience of contingency while assurance refers to a reduction of future possibilities. The analysis of managerial experiences in two German and two Danish PPPs illustrates the interplay between assurance and trust and highlights the significance of trusting in an inevitably contingent and uncertain world. Furthermore it shows the embeddedness of trusting relationships in public-private and national environments and, to conclude, three main insights shall be highlighted.

First, the analysis of trusting processes reflects national embeddedness in so far as in Germany the future openness is inevitably approached with trust while in Denmark trust and contingency are integrated in the PPP. These insights are confirming Lane and Bachmann's

(1996) conclusion that institutions matter for German exchange relationships. Yet, the analysis highlights that trust does not develop because of the contract but rather becomes possible because of the contract's inevitable incompleteness. With regards to Denmark, the insights highlight that the choice for strong relational contracts is not simply based on an expectation of a secured future through social norms and rules but rather assumes an actual open future. Thus, while trust becomes constitutive for the strong relational contracts in Denmark it is extra-contractual in the weak relational contracts in Germany – nonetheless it is significant for partnership processes in all cases.

Second, the analysis also points towards public–private patterns. With regards to the partner selection, it identifies that although public procurement rules were welcomed to assure equal competition and differing inputs, the need for more than procurement procedures was expressed equally by German and Danish managers. This insight is in line with Burchell and Willkinson's (1997) finding that long-term personal relationships were valued important for the development of trust in German exchange relationships (p. 228). Beyond top management the public–private environment provided some conflict when related to a commercial versus a healthcare rationale. For the involved public employees and partly also middle managers healthcare was clearly most important and it was ascribed to the private partner that a more commercial focus was introduced. Hence, generalized distrust towards the private provider was experienced in all four cases.

Third, the article discussed the differing modes of management to be creating differing opportunities for trust and distrust to evolve. While the more hierarchical steering forms in the German hospitals seems to prevent and decrease distrusting tendencies, the more self-steering Danish municipalities create the space for distrust to maintain and develop itself. On the other hand, it has also been argued that eventually self-chosen trust may indeed be stronger than hierarchical-ordered trust. Either way, trusting is significant to deal with an ever-contingent future in PPPs and the analysis has highlighted that inter-organizational trust cannot be easily transferred from one individual to another but requires continuous work on multiple organizational levels.

### **Limitations and future research**

Although the aim of this article was by no means to create a valid and generalizable conclusion, it should be highlighted that a higher number of interviews and cases would have been useful to create an even richer and deeper understanding with regard to the PPP-specific and country-

specific differences. Yet, this was not as much a time challenge as it was a matter of access. Especially, in Germany it proved to be highly difficult to get PPP managers to participate in the research project. In turn, insights remain tentative but given the interpretive and processual approach are inevitably so. Something that has not been approached in this study, but would be interesting for future research, is the employees' experiences of the partnership processes. Furthermore, a longitudinal study with follow-up interviews and several observations could provide valuable insights into the ongoing (re)modelling of the future and the past in such as partnerships evolve in time.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> He had been working there in a different set-up before the partnership started

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## Appendix A: Overview of interviews and observations

	Date (d/m/yy)	Length	Country	Management Level
<b>Case 1:</b>				
<i>Interview 1</i>	8/7/2011	35min	Denmark	Top
<i>Interview 2</i>	2/9/2011	51min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Interview 3</i>	20/9/2011	1h15min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Interview 4</i>	1/11/2011	51min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Interview 5</i>	6/1/2012	51min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Interview 6</i>	16/1/2012	52min	Denmark	Top
<i>Observation 1</i>	5/9/2011	2h	Denmark	-
<b>Case 2:</b>				
<i>Interview 7</i>	30/6/2011	57min	Denmark	Top
<i>Interview 8</i>	23/11/2011	1h26min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Interview 9</i>	6/2/2012	1h4min	Denmark	Top
<i>Interview 10</i>	27/2/2012	1h34min	Denmark	Middle/Top
<i>Observation 2</i>	30/6/2011	ca. 1h30min	Denmark	-
<b>Case 3:</b>				
<i>Interview 11</i>	7/2/13	40min	Germany	Top
<i>Interview 12</i>	20/2/13	37min	Germany	Middle
<i>Interview 13</i>	15/3/13	35min	Germany	Top
<b>Case 4:</b>				
<i>Interview 14</i>	18/1/13	1h12min	Germany	Top
<i>Interview 15</i>	22/2/13	51min	Germany	Top & Middle
<b>Pilot and expert interviews (background)</b>				
<i>Pilot</i>	8/12/2010	49min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Pilot</i>	8/3/2011	50min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Expert</i>	4/1/2012	ca. 45 min	Denmark	-
<i>Expert</i>	13/1/2012	ca. 1h	Denmark	-
<i>Pilot</i>	6/2/2012	ca. 1h	Denmark	Top
<i>Expert</i>	8/5/2012	ca. 1h	Germany	-
<i>Pilot</i>	1/6/2012	ca. 1h	Germany	Top
<i>Expert</i>	13/12/2012	ca. 1,5h	Germany	-
<i>Expert</i>	17/12/2012	Ca. 1h	Germany	-
<i>Pilot</i>	18/1/2013	1h12min	Germany	Top

## **Appendix A: Example of interview guide**

1. To begin with, it would be helpful if you could say a little bit about yourself, your background, and how you got to be in your present job position.
2. How long have you been working in your present position?
3. Have you had other experiences with public-private cooperation in general?
4. Have you been involved in partnerships before?
5. Turning to the current PPP, when/how were you introduced to the PPP idea? Why did you decide to enter a PPP? Have your thoughts changed? Why (or why not)?
6. Were you involved throughout the procurement phase? What did you focus most on throughout this period? What role does the potential partner play? Why (or why not)?
7. Were you involved when negotiating the contract? What was most important to include in the contract? Can you say a little about the negotiator(s) on the other side? And the negotiation process in general?
8. What were the organization's experiences when the PPP started? Did you do anything specifically to prepare the involved parts of the organizations?
9. To the top managers: What were your thoughts concerning the everyday managers? How were they introduced to each other? And how do you know that your middle manager do their best when you are not around?
10. To the middle managers: How were you introduced to the other manager? What were your thoughts? What is important to you?
11. Are you involved in everyday management? Where does this take place? How do you coordinate with your private/public counterpart? What are the most important tasks? What are your experiences with that?
12. How would you evaluate your relationship with the private/public partner? Has it changed compared to the beginning? What happened? (What did not happen?)

13. If interviewee said yes to previous experience with PPP or public-private cooperation in question 3: Does it help you to have previous experience? If yes, how does it change your current performance/behaviour in the PPP?
14. What are your expectations of the partner (responsible manager, team, etc.)? Have they changed over time? What happened? Why (or why not)?
15. Have you experienced challenges during the cooperation? What kind of challenges? How did you manage them? And how was your collaboration with the partner when addressing the challenge?
16. How does it generally work with your employees in the PPP? Are they satisfied, sceptical, positive? Why (or why not)?
17. Have you at any point been disappointed and/or surprised at the partner's performance or behaviour? Why (or why not)?
18. What kind of control mechanisms do you have in the PPP? (Do you monitor, what about performance measurements? Anything else?) How do you experience them?
19. What about the contract? Does it play an important role in the everyday management?
20. How would you evaluate the importance of the relationship for the success of the PPP?
21. In your experience of the PPP relationship, what do you feel has been the most important factor for a successful collaboration? (What about competence, reliability, wavelength?)
22. Specifically trust: do you/can you trust your partner? Why and how? (Refer to stories already told in the interview)
23. Generally, do you trust that the PPP will work out at the end? Why (or why not)?

## Appendix B: Overview of interviews and observations

	Date (d/m/yy)	Length	Country	Management Level
<b>Case 1:</b>				
<i>Interview 1</i>	8/7/2011	35min	Denmark	Top
<i>Interview 2</i>	2/9/2011	51min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Interview 3</i>	20/9/2011	1h15min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Interview 4</i>	1/11/2011	51min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Interview 5</i>	6/1/2012	51min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Interview 6</i>	16/1/2012	52min	Denmark	Top
<i>Observation 1</i>	5/9/2011	2h	Denmark	-
<b>Case 2:</b>				
<i>Interview 7</i>	30/6/2011	57min	Denmark	Top
<i>Interview 8</i>	23/11/2011	1h26min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Interview 9</i>	6/2/2012	1h4min	Denmark	Top
<i>Interview 10</i>	27/2/2012	1h34min	Denmark	Middle/Top
<i>Observation 2</i>	30/6/2011	ca. 1h30min	Denmark	-
<b>Case 3:</b>				
<i>Interview 11</i>	7/2/13	40min	Germany	Top
<i>Interview 12</i>	20/2/13	37min	Germany	Middle
<i>Interview 13</i>	15/3/13	35min	Germany	Top
<b>Case 4:</b>				
<i>Interview 14</i>	18/1/13	1h12min	Germany	Top
<i>Interview 15</i>	22/2/13	51min	Germany	Top & Middle
<b>Pilot and expert interviews (background)</b>				
<i>Pilot</i>	8/12/2010	49min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Pilot</i>	8/3/2011	50min	Denmark	Middle
<i>Expert</i>	4/1/2012	ca. 45 min	Denmark	-
<i>Expert</i>	13/1/2012	ca. 1h	Denmark	-
<i>Pilot</i>	6/2/2012	ca. 1h	Denmark	Top
<i>Expert</i>	8/5/2012	ca. 1h	Germany	-
<i>Pilot</i>	1/6/2012	ca. 1h	Germany	Top
<i>Expert</i>	13/12/2012	ca. 1,5h	Germany	-
<i>Expert</i>	17/12/2012	Ca. 1h	Germany	-
<i>Pilot</i>	18/1/2013	1h12min	Germany	Top



## Appendix C: Identifying text-near nodes for trusting

Please note that the text-near noding for trusting also includes some assuring mechanisms that were directly referred to as helping to form positive expectations. Thereby, I aimed to make sure that the experienced relationship (be it negative or positive) between assurance and trust would not disappear by separating. However, these were deleted once I became aware of the query possibilities in Nvivo. Furthermore, the list has a number of nodes that are almost the same but given the large number it was not always possible to keep track of the previously noded and I knew that I was able to collect them later on. In other words, this list of trust cues and experiences is very preliminary and shall only illustrate how text-near and inductive the first round of noding was.

Trusting Cues & Experiences
Allowing Employees to decide, veto right
Appearance of private partner, although bad experiences with self-same in earlier settings
Audit as good experience
Bad Experience with the institutional partnership model
Being a good listener
Being cautious about the underlying attitudes fearing the private partner to only follow its own mission
Being fast in correcting problems after intro-problems
Being humble and cautious, diplomacy
Being on the same wavelengths
Being present in the public organization two days a week
Being professional to correct problems
Buying and Developing solutions that work
Cautious implementation of control-mechanisms
Checks by management not to check up on employees
Checks by management as something positive interest in their work
Collaborative management, joint decision-making
Commitment to collaborate
Constellation of working groups not having too many critical employees at a time
Continuity of private middle-manager
Creating a balance between self-interests and partnership interests
Creation of one unity, one partnership
Creation of Team Identity in the public department
Deciding on partnership management together (not the private partner)
Developing a solution specific for this municipality and its challenges
Development of new competencies through education as advantage of partnership



Dialogue
Easing the Work Load for employees in department
Economical results more important than professionalism, care
Ensuring a speed of change so all employees can be included
Exchange of public manager in the case of bad relationships and performance in partnership
Financial Difficulties in public department prior to partnership
Finding Possibilities for getting to know each other
First impression of private manager changing, not so dangerous after all
Focus on not getting an us versus them discussion in the partnership
Focus on technical matters to change sceptical culture
Gaining new competencies via private involvement
General professional appearance of private partner
Getting a second opinion, healthy
Getting to know all employees
Getting employees to see that both partners have mutual interests
Getting expertise from others in one's own organization if not expert him or herself
Getting informal moments with the different public managers
Getting the other middle-manager to get ownership of the ideas
Getting the whole organization to agree to the project
Getting the work to understand their work
Giving the employees a job-guaranty
Good Experience with Partnership Solution elsewhere
Good Wavelengths between initial middle-managers
Having a department on the wrong way
Having meetings to explain
Hearing from experiences with partnership form other municipalities (both good and bad)
High degree of changing employees in public department prior to partnership
Ideology not being a reason
Importance of being there (private manager)
Importance of employees liking the private middle-manager
Including a politician that is positive about partnerships, and the project in the steering group
Including employees as to develop ownership for a new idea, getting themselves to have the idea
Including employees in forming the small steps
Including more experienced people from the private organization than the middle-manager
Including other stakeholders in the steering group to prevent interrupting noise from outside
Including the external specialist for the municipality into the partnership process
Inclusion of middle-managers in steering group as way to know what is going on
Inclusion of other private employees improving the professionalism
Inclusion of other private employees to ensure the use of previous experience in the private firm
Institutional Partnership as difficult

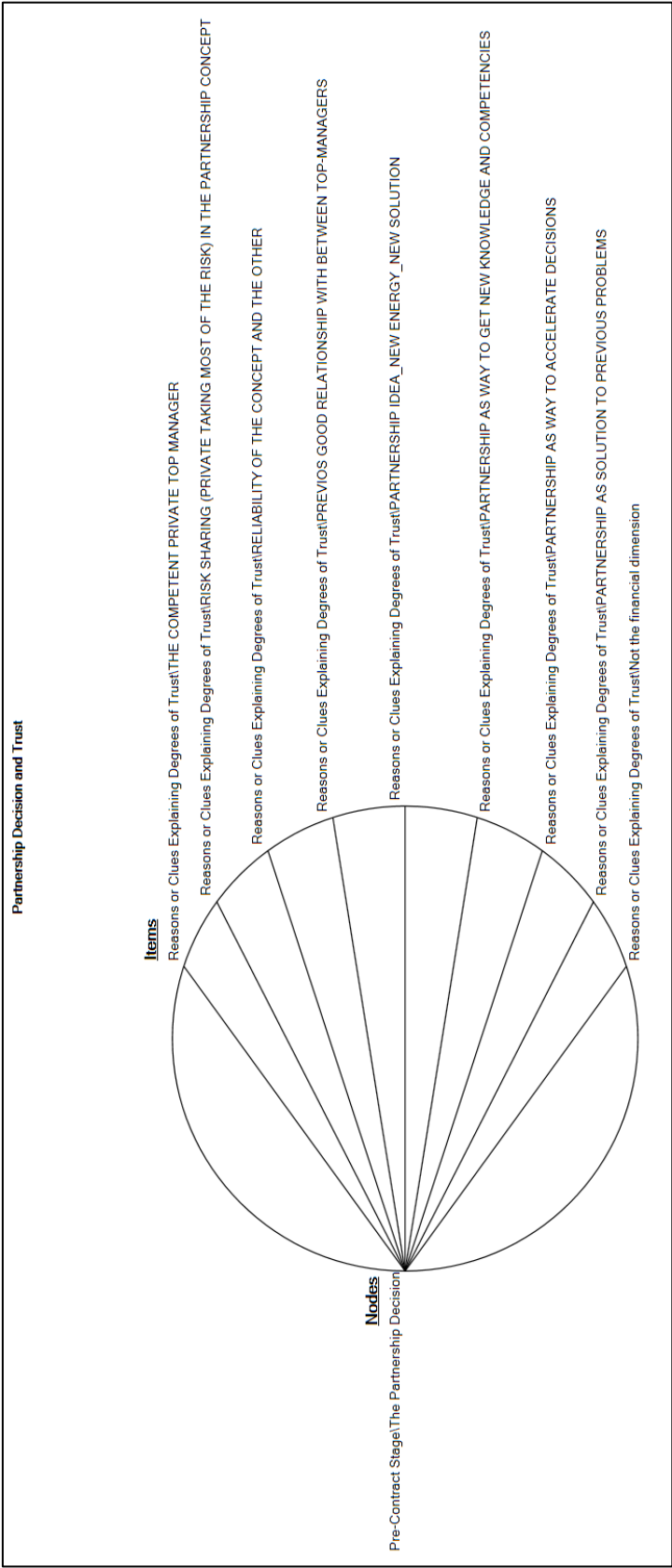
Introducing the Advantage of getting a stranger into the organization
Joint Interest in Developing Organization
Letting employees decide on development, excluding xxx from working groups
Making it more fun to work
Management Commitment (top-management)
Match between problems and solution provided by partnership solution
Meeting in the middle, accepting the public's starting point
Middle-Manager as loyal and positive partner
Middle-Manager gets more resources for his or her department
Need for direction in partnership
Need for inter-personal relationship feelings
New co-worker focus on production management
new employees on same conditions as old employees
New employees will be hired by municipality
No Partnership means more pressure for employees in the department
Non-confronting personality of the other middle-manager
Not being a standard solution
Not being good enough to solve the problems alone
Not forcing a new idea onto the team
Not questioning the employees competence
Not seriously promoting the procurement process
Partner having a big organization behind, economically and image-wise
Partner having experience with other partnerships
Partnership as best solution for everybody
Partnership as joint interests and surplus
Partnership as <i>one</i> way to solve the existent problems
Partnership as way to develop organization
Partnership as way to develop own organization not just transfer of responsibility to outside organization
Partnership as way to get help for the team
Partnership as way to get new resources
Partnership as way to save money and earn money win-win
Partnership Model as a way to save public money
Partnership with joint success criteria
Partnership sounding like a good idea
Performance better than alone (without partner)
Personal Acquaintance with private top-manager as introduction to the partnership idea
Personal Trustful Acquaintance between top-managers
Political Commitment
Political Commitment to the partnership idea
Postponing the audit

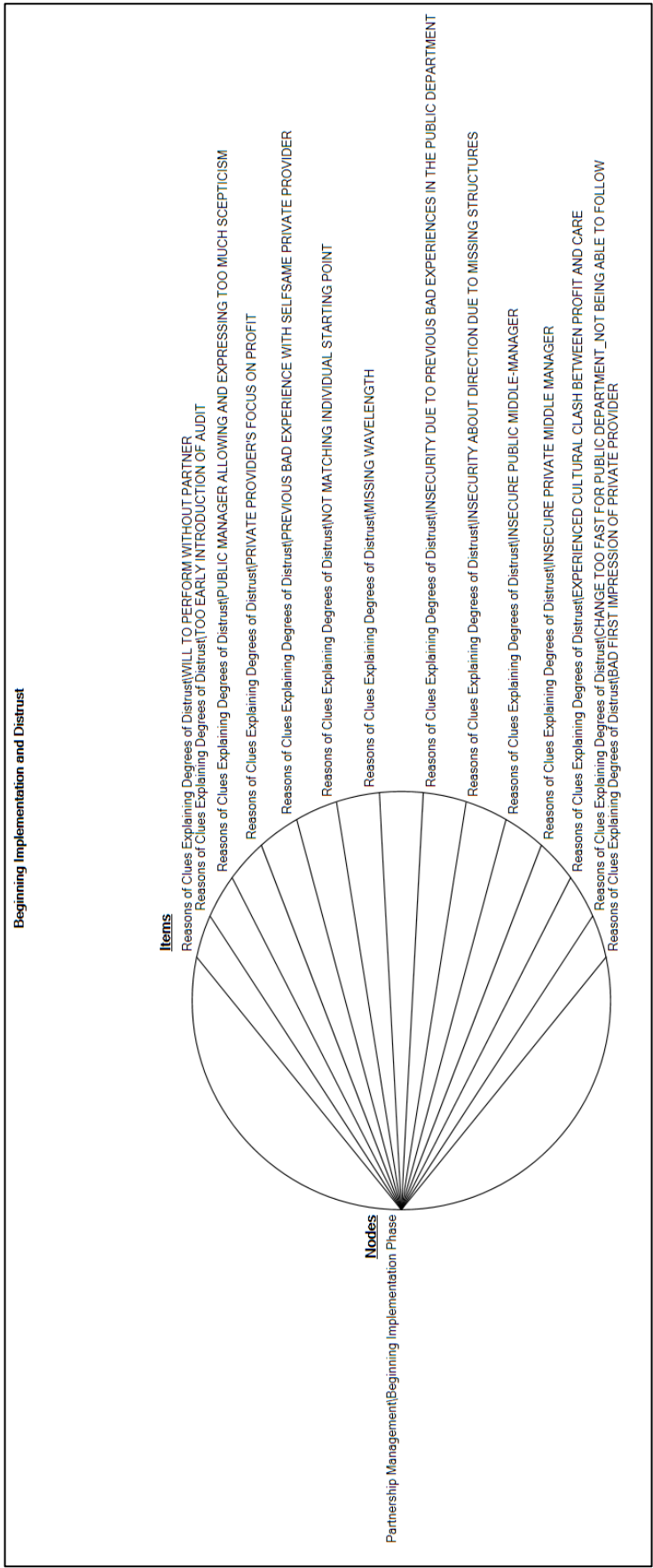
Preparing employees for the partnership
Presentation of experience with other municipalities to the politicians by private firm
Presenting something new and good as alternative to the previous municipal world
Previous Experience with Partnerships of the Private Partner
previous experience with planning and process-work
Previous Personal Acquaintance with Private Top-Manager
Private Manager staying out of management
Private Middle-Manager Focus on Results not Management
Private Partner living up to the objective criteria
Private Partner offering the best way of approaching the problem
Private Provider being a big and stable firm
Private Top-Manager actively approaching previous mistakes
Private Top-Manager coming with energy
Private Top-Manager introducing alternative model to previous mistake-model
Problems in public organization as reason to think new
Problems with second-actor-constellations
Process from being formal to more personal relationship
Procurement Process
Procurement Process because they had to
Public Manager keeping what he or she promises
Public-Manager Open for Ideas
Results important for politicians and Trade Union, Employees
Results in other Partnerships with same Private Partner
Saving Money as good reason for Politicians to choose partnership model
Second Intro-Meeting with focus on general expectations of this partnership
Security about the own role (public manager) giving confidence about partnership
Seeing Results
Sending new persons after mismatch with intro-personal
Shaping community with employees, professional-coordinators and politicians
Some employees positive
Strengthening the Public Middle-Managers Management Platform
Taking small steps
The experienced co-worker being on the same wavelengths as public-middle manager
The financial dimension and private risk in partnership model
The Partnership Concept
The public manager holding again in order to create success, good ground for collaboration
The public not being able to perform the same without the private partnership
The role of the team leader being there with or without partnership
Time to change critical culture in municipality
Time to explain the partnership concept
Time to get to know each other

Trust to the employees representing the private firm
Using the municipal background to express understanding for the employees difficult work everyday
Wide spectrum of ideologies to agree on partnership model, project
Work with experiences and attitudes towards the private partner, if critiques exist



Appendix D: Examples for identified subthemes in differing PPP phases





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